Al-Mīzān

An Exegesis of the Qur'an

ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī

Translated by: Tawus Raja

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In the Name of Allah,
the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds;
the Beneficent, the Merciful;
the Master of the Day of Judgment;
Thee only we serve, and to Thee alone we beseech
for help;
Guide us in the straight path;
The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed
favors,not of those against whom Thou art
wrathful, nor of those who are astray.

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O' Allah! send Your blessings to the head of
Your messengers and the last of
Your prophets,
Muḥammad and his pure and cleansed progeny.
Also send Your blessings to all Your
prophets and envoys.

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Arabic Transliteration Key

Arabic Letters	Transliteration	Arabic Letters	Transliteration
ا	ā	ع	ʿ
ب	b	غ	gh
ت	t	ف	f
ث	th	ق	q
ج	j	ك	k
ح	ḥ	ل	l
خ	kh	م	m
د	d	ن	n
ذ	dh	ه	h
ر	r	و	w/ū
ز	z	ى	y/ī
س	s	ء	ʾ
ش	sh	ة	-
ص	ṣ	ـَ	a
ض	ḍ	ـَ	i
ط	ṭ	ـُ	u
ظ	ẓ		

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Publisher's Note

In an effort to make the text more accessible to English-speaking readers, the editors have chosen to use English names for the prophets and figures (as listed below but not limited to) and to use Anglicized terms that now appear in English dictionaries.

Ādam	Adam	Mūsā	Moses
David	David	Sulaymān	Solomon
Aaron	Aaron	Shuʿayb	Jethro
Ibrāhīm	Abraham	Yaʿqūb	Jacob
ʿĪsā	Jesus	ʾAyyūb	Job
Isḥāq	Isaac	Yūshaʿ	Joshua
Ismāʿīl	Ishmael	Joseph	Joseph
Jibrāʾīl	Gabriel	Zakariyyā	Zachariah
Mary	Mary	ʿUzayr	Ezra

Arabic terms and names have been transliterated according to the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*).

For ease of reading, glyphs and traditional honorifics such as "peace be upon him" or (s.a.w.) which are commonly used as a gesture of respect after the name of the Prophet Muhammad, the Imams, or other sacred figures have been omitted from this text. No disrespect is intended, and may God's peace and blessings be upon them all!

Foreword

The English volumes 39 and 40 are translations of the Arabic volume 20 of *al-Mīzān*, which covers the last 45 sūrahs of the Qur'an (70-114). These are the shortest chapters of the Qur'an, which were predominantly revealed in the early years of the Prophet's mission in Mecca. The chapters have been used, from the time of the Prophet up to our age, to introduce the beginners to the Book of God. The brevity and rhyme of the verses make them easy to remember, which is an excellent way of developing a personal relationship with the Qur'an. Here we shall present a few tips and guidelines on how a lay reader can engage with *al-Mīzān* specifically, and with the Qur'an more generally.

How to Read *al-Mīzān*

First, we must realize that there are numerous approaches to Qur'anic *tafsīr* (commentary, interpretation, exegesis). Each method has its own strengths, limitations and followers. As students of the Qur'an, we must have an appreciation for diversity and plurality of opinion, though we may favor one view or method over another. When it comes to content analysis—as in the case of a scripture—we need to define clear units of meaning, and prioritize the weight we give to each. This enables us to decode the meaning in a structured and consistent manner, though it also sets limits on our interpretation at the same time. Our assumptions and priorities help us zoom on certain aspects of the text, but they also impede us from engaging with other aspects of it. That is inevitable.

The method of ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī is commonly known as "interpreting the Qur'an with the Qur'an" (*tafsīr al-Qurʾān bil-Qurʾān*). This itself can be done in many ways. The author's approach can more accurately be described as a *contextual* commentary of the Qur'an. In interpreting the verses and favoring one meaning over another, the author primarily relies on the *siyāq* (context, theme) of the verses—a word which has appeared around 2,100 times in *al-Mīzān*. He divides every chapter (sūrah) into several sets of verses (*āyāt*, sing. *āyah*) which follow a common theme. The internal themes in each sūrah serve the general theme of the sūrah as a whole.

This reveals an underlying assumption in the author's work. He

approaches the Qur'an with the assumption that every verse is connected to the verse before it and the verse after it. Thus, a verse should not be viewed independently, but it must be assessed in the context of its previous and subsequent verses. Furthermore, each chapter of the Qur'an has a unifying theme that runs throughout the chapter, and is pursued by its verses. This may be less applicable to the lengthy chapters at the beginning of the Qur'an, but the author would certainly apply it to the shorter chapters toward the end.

What matters the most to ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī is the *immediate context* of the verses. This can be contrasted with a slightly different method of interpreting the Qur'an with the Qur'an that is found in the works of a prominent and prolific student of his, Jawādī Āmulī—who considers himself to be a follower of the ʿAllāmah's school of *tafsīr*, and who gives all the credit to his late teacher. In Jawādī Āmulī's approach, a verse is viewed less in the mirror of its surrounding verses, and more in the mirror of the Qur'an as a whole. In other words, in comparison to one another, ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī has a more *local* assessment of the verse, while Jawādī Āmulī has a more *global* approach.

Nevertheless, what we can learn from either scholar is *how* to fish. As we study *al-Mīzān*, it is instrumental to infer the author's methodology so that we can apply it to any verse that we read on our own. One reason behind the author's brevity and lack of repetition in many places is that he did not want his readers to become too dependent on his authority, but wanted them to become independent thinkers who can stand on their own feet. There is a limit to spoon-feeding in education, especially for a book that constantly endorses the pursuit of knowledge, contemplation and reasoning. "One repays a teacher badly if one always remains a pupil only."[1]

Ascend to heaven, if with the Prophet you have a tie;
Kiss the face of the moon, since you're standing so high.
He split up the moon, so why are you a cloud?
He was agile and fast, so why don't you try?
In a house of sugar, why are you sour?
In the spring of life, how come you're dry?
Why should lion cubs be scared of a fox?

1 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. A. Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 59.

Foreword

Should a thoroughbred horse, from a donkey, be shy?[1]

ᶜAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī goes through each chapter verse-by-verse. He tackles each verse by first defining its vocabulary and linguistics. He commonly uses al-Rāghib's *al-Mufradāt*, al-Ṭabrisī's *Majmaᶜ al-bayān* and al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf* as his lexicons. What is often missing in is linguistic discussions is the Qur'anic usage of the terms, which can be vital in discerning the most primary meaning of the verse. In terms of linguistics, he is very sensitive about the *conjunctions* at the beginning of the verses or phrases, which serve as connections and transitions between different elements of the speech. This is at the very core of his method, which hinges on discovering the common thread that runs through the verses. That is why he never fails to discuss words such as "and" (letter *wāw*), "or" (*aw*, *am*), "therefore" (letter *fāʾ*), "then" (*thumma*), "rather" (*bal*), "but" (*lākinna*), "except" (*illā*), "nay" (*kallā*), and "when" (*idh*, *idhā*).

While these subtle technicalities may not be of interest to many readers, they factor significantly in the author's basis for preferring one meaning over another. Readers who wish to get more engaged with *al-Mīzān* and appreciate the author's method should not shy away from these discussions. They are neither trivial nor a marginal part of *al-Mīzān*. In volume 39, most of these discussions have been moved to a footnote, marked by (Auth.). This was done to make the text more fluent, coherent and readable for the average English audience.

The author also presents the views of other exegetes under each verse, with a short comment on their strength. Again, his main criterion for accepting or rejecting a view is the *siyāq* (context, theme) of the verses. This, to some extent, requires an intimate relationship with the Qur'an which can only be built through persistent study and contemplation. One can develop a concrete sense for the main message and tone of the verses through constant exposure to them in a structured way. The author's structured approach is to look for the main aim of the chapter, which is always laid out in the opening verses. The rest is much like domino: all the verses in the chapter are assumed to pursue that theme; hence, they are interpreted in a way that can be reduced to the original message. One of the students of the ᶜAllāmah wrote:

> The primary advantage of *al-Mīzān* over other commentaries is that it explains the verses of the Qur'an with the help of the

1 Rūmī, *ghazal* 638.

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> other verses… Rather, the entire Qur'an resembles *one* speech, delivered by *a single* speaker, and any two of its sentences could explain and relate to each other. Thus, if there is an ambiguity in the meaning of a verse, it will be clarified by referring to the other verses on that topic or similar topics.
>
> This *tafsīr* aims at obtaining the meaning of the Qur'an from the Qur'an before anything else, and sets that as basis. Then, according to that basis, it assesses the plausibility of the other meanings proposed by the external sources. This is exactly the opposite of the approach where one sets his own impression of the meaning of the verses as basis and then tries to mold the Qur'an to one's own ideas.[1]

Another element of the author's structured methodology is to separate his interpretation of the verses from his examination of the narrations. This is a crucial lesson to learn from *al-Mīzān*, which is unfortunately not practiced—nor even acknowledged—among most scholars and students in the traditional seminaries. The key here to having a holistic view, without compromising any value, is to realize that there are several layers of meaning and application for the verses. This opens one up to multiple interpretations, each of which can be true in its place. It also calls for a standard to prioritize the suggested meanings. In the author's view, every verse has a primary or apparent meaning (*ẓāhir*) which can be deduced from Qur'anic evidence alone. Everything else, though significant or mystical, is secondary compared to that. The primary meaning is like a recipe or manual which can be applied to a diverse set of external events according to their social circumstances and historical contexts. This is the role of almost all narrations that interpret the verses of the Qur'an: they do not offer the *primary meaning* of a verse, but they offer a *specific application* of the verse, without confining the verse to that particular instance. This is also called the principle of the "flow" of the Qur'an. The same can be said about historical accounts which define the causes or contexts of revelation of the verses (*asbāb al-nuzūl*).

This is the author's theory of "application and matching" (*jary wa inṭibāq* or *taṭbīq*), which stipulates that the Qur'an is not limited to a

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1 Ḥusaynī Ṭihrānī, *Shining Sun* (London: ICAS Press, 2011), pp. 46-47, emphasis in the original.

specific point in time and space, and its verses are not confined by the context of their revelation. Rather, the verses can be extended to circumstances beyond the original setting in which they were revealed. The author has deduced this from some pivotal narrations which say that the Qur'an "flows" (*yajrī*) like the flowing of the night, the day, the sun and the moon; and has applications for both the living and the dead. Just as there is an incessant regeneration of night and day; just as the heavenly bodies keep moving in their orbits and shining light on the earth; the Qur'an also continues to have a message and application for new generations and circumstances. Here are three narrations which reflect this principle:

(1) The Prophet said, "The Qur'an has been sent down with seven aspects. Each aspect [in another version: each verse] of it has an external and an internal. Every aspect has a boundary, and each boundary has an entrance [to be approached from]."[1]

(2) Once Imam al-Bāqir was asked about the above Prophetic narration. He explained: "Its external is its revealed text (*tanzīl*). Its internal is its hidden reality (*taʾwīl*). Some of it has come to pass, and some of it is yet to come. It flows like the flowing of the sun and the moon. Whenever any hidden reality of it appears, it is applicable to the dead as it is applicable to the living."[2]

(3) Imam al-Ṣādiq said, "Indeed the Qur'an is living and never dies. Its verses are living and never die. If a verse that is revealed about a people were to die with the death of those people, then the Qur'an would also expire. However, it is applicable to those who remain as it was applicable to those who passed."

Indeed the Qur'an is living and has never died. It flows like the flowing of the night and the day, and like the flowing of the sun and the moon. It is applicable to our later generations as it was applicable to our earlier ones.[3]

---

1 Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr* (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyyah, 1984), 10:105-106. Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 1:418.

2 Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt* (Qum: Manshūrāt Maktabat Āyatullāh al-ʿUẓmá al-Marʿashī al-Najafī, 1404/1984). ʿAyyāshī, *Kitāb al-tafsīr* (Tehran: al-Maṭbaʿat al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1380/1961), 1:11. Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1983), 89:94, 97.

3 ʿAyyāshī, *Kitāb al-tafsīr*, 2:203-204. Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 35:403-404.

Though the Qur'an is a fathomless ocean with deep mysteries that are only accessible to adept divers, it also has a shore and surface which are manifest to everyone. That is the apparent meaning of the text, which by no means is an insolvable puzzle. The Qur'an is a complete book which does not require any external source to speak on its behalf. Since it is sent for all humankind, its general purport can be understood by any reader. Any other source is at best a tool that enables the audience to engage with the Book on a more advanced level, and appreciate its subtle hints.

It is absurd to set the narrations—whose authenticity is nowhere comparable to the Qur'an's—as one's primary source for religious knowledge, overshadowing the Qur'an. In a private conversation with one of his close students, the author explained the logical contradiction in giving a higher priority to the narrations over the Qur'an. This is because the authenticity of a narration:

> hinges on the authenticity of the word of the Imam who has said that narration. And the authenticity of the Imam's word hinges on the authenticity of the word of the Prophet, who has appointed the Imam as his infallible successor. And the authenticity of the Prophet's word hinges on the authenticity of the Qur'an, which has introduced him as an infallible leader, prophet, and guardian…
>
> All Muslims concur on the authenticity of the Glorious Qur'an. On many occasions our Imams drew on the verses of the Qur'an as evidence for their contentions. They have affirmed the Qur'an's authenticity, and there is no doubt or uncertainty on this subject.[1]

It is common among mainstream Shias to close down on any statement other than the teachings of the Prophet's Household (Ahl al-Bayt), or a scholar who is versed in their school. They see this as a sign of piety and devotion to the Imams: to only quote from them, and not accept any other source of guidance. That is unfortunate. Knowledge has no nationality, and guidance is to be taken regardless of its source. No one has a monopoly on truth. (Read the last sentence again.)

This is in fact diametrically opposed to the teachings and path of Ahl al-Bayt. The followers of Ahl al-Bayt must be *truth-bound*. After all, that is presumably their basis for subscribing to the leadership of the Imams.

---

1 Ḥusaynī Ṭihrānī, *Shining Sun*, p. 333.

Truth and guidance are not defined by people. Here are a few narrations from Imam ʿAlī which explicitly convey this meaning:

(1) "God's religion cannot to be identified with men. Rather, it is to be identified by the sign of truth. Know the truth, then you will know its people."[1]

(2) "Truth and falsehood cannot be identified by the [social] position of the people, nor by applying personal opinion. Know the truth [first], then you will know its people; and know falsehood [first], then you will know its people."[2]

(3) "Take wisdom wherever it may be. Sometimes there is wisdom in the bosom of a hypocrite, but it is restless there, until it comes out and finds peace with others of its own kind, in the bosom of a believer."[3]

(4) "Wisdom is a lost article of a believer.[4] Therefore, get wisdom even from the hypocrites."[5]

(5) "Get wisdom from whoever brings it for you. Look at *what* is being said; do not look at *who* is saying it."[6]

The above is almost a verbatim translation of what Prophet Jesus said to his followers: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."[7] Similarly, the Qur'an says: *The nearest of all people to Abraham are those who follow him* (3:68).

If the ideological intolerance of extremist groups is reprehensible, our scientific intolerance would be even more reprehensible and out of place. It is one thing to be rigid in one's *behavior*, and another to be rigid in one's *thinking*. Rather, the latter is the root and foundation of the former, and thus far more dangerous. ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī is a great model to follow

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1 Mufīd, *al-Amālī* (Qum: Jamāʿat al-Mudarrisīn, 1403/1982), p. 5; Ṭūsī, *al-Amālī* (Qum: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1414/1993), p. 626.

2 Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, p. 239.

3 *Nahj al-balāghah*, Aphorism 79.

4 That is, a believer is entitled to wisdom as its rightful owner.

5 *Nahj al-balāghah*, Aphorism 80.

6 *Ghurar al-ḥikam*, no. 612.

7 John 8:31-32 (NIV).

in this regard. He thoroughly studied the works of prominent Muslim exegetes, including al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭabrisī, al-Rāzī, al-Ālūsī and Riḍā. Further, he studied non-Islamic sources, including other scriptures and the works of non-religious thinkers. He does not hesitate to quote their views with approval, regardless of their denomination. Not only that, but he also demonstrates critical thinking and independent judgment in assessing what is narrated from the Ahl al-Bayt. The affiliation of no person or statement blinds his power of reason. This is one of the meta-lessons of *al-Mīzān*.

The greatest act of worship in Islam is contemplation, particularly for the kind of person who would crack *al-Mīzān*. And contemplation by nature is independent. When the Qur'an commands us to reflect, seek knowledge and apply reason, it means searching for the truth wherever it may be, acknowledging it wherever we may find it, and adopting it without any reservation. There is no such thing as closed-minded thinking, because that is not thinking anymore. In other words, "thinking" is synonymous with "free thinking" and "independent thinking" because of the nature of thought. To be a *follower* in *thinking* is an oxymoron.

Perhaps what impedes most people from a quest for truth irrespective of its appellation is the fear of arriving at falsehood and thus qualifying for eternal damnation. This, again, is a misconception of the Prophetic mission and the Qur'anic message, for truth is not a *destination* to arrive at, but the very *process* of searching. *And whoever leaves his home migrating toward Allah and His Messenger, and is then over-taken by death, his reward shall certainly fall on Allah* (4:100). Religious value is defined by one's understanding and realization of the transcendent, not by dead facts that one holds mentally or shells of practice that one demonstrates physically. For that matter, following any source of authority—such as a teacher, a school or a tradition—must be done in a way that helps one stand on one's feet independently, take responsibility, and have a first-hand experience of religious truths.

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There are infinite stations in His realm, I pray:
Forget about the goal; your goal is the way.[1]

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1 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, vol. 3, lines 1962-1963.

Foreword

A main criterion of divine prophethood is: *Follow them who do not ask you any reward and they are rightly guided* (36:21). Reward here is not limited to financial payment. The greatest tax for a leader's task is to ask or expect one to always remain a follower, to hand over their freedom, and to repress their reason. The duty of God's prophets was exactly the opposite of this: to liberate the people's intellects from the norms, attachments and considerations which cloud their vision, weight down their reason, and fetter their feet in practice. *Al-Mīzān* teaches us how to grow up and stop being minors and dependents intellectually. Here is a useful test for self-assessment: You are not a seeker of truth if you are *intimidated* by any authority, regardless of their credentials and popularity.[1]

Who is a master? One who sets thee free;
Who unties the knot of bondage from thee.
The prophets are keys that open the door;
The believers are indebted to the prophets for sure.
O community of believers, rejoice with glee;
Like the lily and the cedar dance so free.[2]

On the Night of Decree (*laylat al-qadr*), the best deed is reflection and pursuit of knowledge. This calls for a pivotal revision of our notion of worship. When we attend a Qur'an gathering, or sit down for an independent study, we must do so with the mindset that we are engaging in the highest act of worship. We must do so with the intention of drawing closer to God, which means transcending limitations and realizing the absolute oneness underlying all phenomena. As Muslims who are critical of the Khārijites, we must be careful to not define religious growth based on ritualistic and traditional forms of practice. If *reciting* the Qur'an is meritorious, then *understanding* the Qur'an and *realizing* its truths within oneself are far more meritorious. For this reason, it behooves the students of Qur'an to not be so intent on the *volume* of their reading and memorization, but be more committed to the *quality* and *depth* of their engagement. Likewise, reflecting on one verse for ten minutes is a much greater

1 Readers interested in this line of thought are strongly encouraged to consult Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, First Part, Zarathustra's Prologue, §9.

2 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, vol. 6, lines 4554-4556.

gift for the deceased than reading several pages quickly in ten minutes.

As such, the readers are recommended to maintain—and extend—the time they spend on the Qur'an, but dedicate that time primarily to their understanding and application of the verses. This is particularly applicable to the month of Ramadan, when Muslims generally pay more attention to the Qur'an. Reading voraciously to fill scorecards of having completed the Qur'an is incompatible with the Qur'an's own criterion. The Prophet said, "There are many who recite the Qur'an while the Qur'an curses them."[1] Imam ʿAlī said, "There are many who fast but whose share from their fasting is only hunger and thirst. There are many who pray at night, but their share from their prayer is only sleeplessness and pain. Bravo to the sleeping and eating of those who are clever."[2]

Bringing the Qur'an to Our Lives

The first point to note here is that we get out of something what we put in it. This is an evident principle which is often ignored when it comes to religious and spiritual practice. When making financial income requires years of education and training, it would be naïve to expect to make spiritual income without effort and dedication. Building a relationship with the Qur'an, just like building any other relationship, requires an investment of time and energy. We cannot expect to become intimate with the Book of God, taste its sweetness, and fathom its profound meanings, as long as we are standing upon priorities which impede us from sitting with the Qur'an. That is absurd. Meanwhile, it is always possible to open *some* time in our schedule and rearrange our commitments, as long as we have made up our mind and are serious in our intention. Here we shall present a series of practical tips which enhance one's engagement with the Qur'an. They can be used by readers of all ages and levels, both individually and collectively.

(1) Start your session by reflecting on your intention. Bring your attention to what you are about to do: you are about to listen to a message from your Lord, which has been sent for you personally. He loves you so much that He recorded His message in the most beautiful voice, and

1 Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 89:184.

2 *Nahj al-balāghah*, Aphorism 145.

sent it with the most beloved person to Him, who was persecuted and abused in this way. That is how much He cares about your growth. That is how much you should appreciate this gift. No sacrifice that you make to uphold and practice this message is too much.

(2) Whatever you expect to get from a source, that is what you will pick up. The Qur'an is rich enough of a source to feed believers and skeptics alike. If you go in looking for flaws and inconsistencies, you will certainly not return empty-handed.

If odor and color is all that you care,
Wherever you glare, that is your share.
Seekers that have something on their mind,
That's all they see, and that's what they'll find.[1]

If you indeed have a need to fathom the creed, you will find abundant tips that help you succeed. *We send down in the Qur'an that which is a healing and mercy for the believers, while it increases the wrongdoers only in loss* (17:82).

When the host is magnanimous,
In His party will be placed
Every kind of dish
For every kind of taste.[2]

You set the frequency you wish to tune in to. *Thereby He leads many astray, and thereby He guides many; and He leads no one astray thereby except the transgressors* (2:26). Approach the Qur'an with the intention of gaining the light and guidance that God has promised in it: *We have sent down the Book to you as a clarification of all things, and as a guidance and mercy and good news for the submitters* (16:89).

The Qur'an is a rope, and you are in a well;
Those who are not wise, it leads them to hell.
The problem's with *you*, and not with the rope;

1 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, vol. 4, line 2377. The second half is attributed to Rūmī and found in some less authentic versions of the *Mathnawī*.

2 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, vol. 3, lines 1897-1898.

Do you have the intention to climb up the slope?
Ask God to help you penetrate the veils,
And not be thrown off by the subtle details.[1]

(3) It is befitting to dedicate the reward of your recitation and study (the latter being more significant than the former) to our beloved Muḥammad. He was indeed the greatest gift to humanity. The Qur'an is a very effective vehicle for strengthening our bond with the Prophet. It is unfortunate that many Shias do not have an intimate loving relationship with their savior.

Such a noble character, the intercessor of nations;
Such manners that he had, the Prophet of creations.
An orphan who had never been taught how to read,
Washed off the libraries of the nations, indeed.[2]

(4) Recite a short supplication before opening the Qur'an, such as the following rich supplication by Imam al-Ṣādiq:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمنِ الرَّحِيمِ. اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَشْهَدُ أَنَّ هَذَا كِتَابُكَ الْمُنْزَلُ مِنْ عِنْدِكَ عَلَى رَسُولِكَ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ وَ كَلَامُكَ النَّاطِقُ عَلَى لِسَانِ نَبِيِّكَ جَعَلْتَهُ هَادِياً مِنْكَ إِلَى خَلْقِكَ وَ حَبْلًا مُتَّصِلًا فِيمَا بَيْنَكَ وَ بَيْنَ عِبَادِكَ. اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي نَشَرْتُ عَهْدَكَ وَ كِتَابَكَ. اللَّهُمَّ فَاجْعَلْ نَظَرِي فِيهِ عِبَادَةً وَ قِرَاءَتِي فِيهِ فِكْراً وَ فِكْرِي فِيهِ اعْتِبَاراً وَ اجْعَلْنِي مِمَّنِ اتَّعَظَ بِبَيَانِ مَوَاعِظِكَ فِيهِ وَ اجْتَنَبَ مَعَاصِيَكَ. وَ لَا تَطْبَعْ عِنْدَ قِرَاءَتِي عَلَى سَمْعِي وَ لَا تَجْعَلْ عَلَى بَصَرِي غِشَاوَةً وَ لَا تَجْعَلْ قِرَاءَتِي قِرَاءَةً لَا تَدَبُّرَ فِيهَا بَلِ اجْعَلْنِي أَتَدَبَّرُ آيَاتِهِ وَ أَحْكَامَهُ آخِذاً بِشَرَايِعِ دِينِكَ. وَ لَا تَجْعَلْ نَظَرِي فِيهِ غَفْلَةً وَ لَا

1 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, vol. 3, lines 4212-4214.

2 Saʿdī, *Būstān*, "In praise of God."

قِرَاءَتِي هَذَراً. إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الرَّءُوفُ الرَّحِيمُ.

In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful. O God, I bear witness that this is Your revealed book: from You to Your messenger Muḥammad son of ʿAbd-Allāh. It is Your words, spoken through the tongue of Your Prophet. You have made it a guide from You to Your creatures, and a connected rope between You and Your servants. O God, I hereby open Your covenant and book. O God, make my look on it be an act of worship, my recitation of it be accompanied by reflection, and my reflection on it be coupled with learning lessons. Make me one of those who take admonition by Your admonitions in it, and who refrain from Your disobedience. Do not seal my ears when I recite it, nor place a curtain over my sight. Do not make my recitation a recitation that lacks contemplation, but make me contemplate its verses and rules, and adhere to the injunctions of Your religion. Do not make me heedlessly look at it, nor make my recitation vain. Indeed You are the Ever-Kind, the Ever-Merciful.[1]

(5) Try to recite the original Arabic of the verses. If you cannot, listen to it. Note that it is obligatory to remain silent whenever the Qur'an is being recited, in any language: *When the Qur'an is recited, listen to it and be silent, maybe you will receive [Allah's] mercy* (7:204).

(6) Read the translation in a language that you find convenient and meaningful. Even readers who understand the Arabic are encouraged to read a translation of the verses. This allows you to better digest and absorb the meaning. It is also useful to read two translations side-by-side. This is a simple yet effective strategy that shows you which parts are more agreed upon, and which parts are more open to dispute. I have consulted numerous English translations of the Qur'an, and found all of them to accurately convey the overall meaning of the verses. Notwithstanding the unique features of each, I have not noticed any major or systematic errors in any of them. Therefore, the

1 Mufīd, *al-Ikhtiṣāṣ* (Beirut: Dār al-Mufīd, 1993), p. 141. Ṭabrisī, *Makārim al-akhlāq* (Qum: Manshūrat al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, 1412/1991), p. 343. Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 89:207. This supplication is also quoted in *Mafātīḥ al-jinān*, under the first day of Ramadan.

reader should find one which resonates with them, and be assured that the Qur'an's message is more powerful than being lost in translation.

(7) After reading one or few verses—up to one page maximum—stop. Reflect on each verse that you just read, and ask yourself, "How is this applicable to me? Given my current conditions, what is God trying to tell me here? How can I put this verse into practice?" Do not do a hasty job here. Do not rush yourself. It helps very much to write these down, either physically or electronically—not necessarily to share with others, nor for the future reference of oneself, but as an effective strategy for learning and thinking. This stage is what distinguish between the profane and profound reciters of the Qur'an. You must give yourself sufficient time to absorb the teachings and come up with solutions for self-development. Imagine that you are a compassionate counsellor who is sought for practical advice—by yourself. This is how knowledge translates into action, and what was external or mental becomes genuinely yours.[1]

(8) After reading and reflecting on the translation, the next step is to analyze the significance of the words. One must respect the following threefold hierarchy in doing so: (i) The meaning and usage of the word in the Qur'an. The Qur'an has its own terminology, and that takes precedence over any other meaning or usage of a term. There are many websites, applications and books (such as *Muʿjam al-alfāẓ*) which provide a Qur'anic list of words with a common three-letter Arabic root. Consulting the usage of the same root in other verses in the Qur'an can be a very empowering, educating and gratifying experience. Furthermore, one should look up other synonyms with different roots. That will provide one with a more comprehensive topical study. (ii) The conventional meaning and common usage of the word (called *ʿurf*). The Qur'an was revealed for a general audience,

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1 This practice is not limited to the Qur'an. Rather, a spiritual seeker must see *every event* as a message and gift from the Absolute. To realize the deeper truths of monotheism, we must constantly remind ourselves that any person, being or experience which pops up in our life is not an independent entity, nor autonomous in how it affects us. They are all agents and reflection of the divine; they are puppets in the hands of a Grand Puppeteer. If all manifestations of being are rooted in the Absolute Being, then they are all worthy of paying attention to, and learning from.

not for sophisticated linguists, logicians or philosophers. Its primary meaning is not cryptic to require advanced decoding. One need not go off on a tangent or stretch the meaning to remote possibilities. God says: *Indeed We have made it [the Qur'an] simple in your language, so that they may take admonition* (44:58); *Certainly We have made the Qur'an simple for the sake of admonishment. So is there anyone who will be admonished?* (54:17, 54:22, 54:32, 54:40). This stage may be more accessible to native Arabic speakers, but can also be acquired by everyone through exposure to classical Arabic texts and dialogues. ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī explained:

> In terms of the meaning that initially comes to the reader's mind, it seems that all of the Noble Qur'an has been set forth very simply, such that it is understandable by everyone. Nevertheless, there are other planes and layers of meaning beyond the initial meaning that gradually become harder and more difficult to understand. Those are the inward and hidden (*bāṭinī*) meanings of the Qur'an. The apparent (*ẓāhir*) meaning of every verse of the Qur'an is plain, simple, and intelligible. But the hidden meanings become more and more complex.[1]

(iii) The meaning and usage of the word in the lexicons. This is perhaps the most straightforward and accessible stage of investigating a term. For this reason, it can be done before the other two stages, to set the ball rolling. However, in terms of setting one's priorities and deducing the primary purport of a verse, the lexical definition of a word should not be given a higher rank than the other two stages. It is trivial to imagine that the Qur'an can be decoded with a dictionary. It is in this sense that a literal interpretation of the Qur'an is one of the weakest methods of *tafsīr*.[2]

(9) As instructed in several narrations,[3] when you read about heavenly rewards, pause and ask God to bless you with them. When you come across His excruciating punishment, pray that He protects you from it. Ponder on how each otherworldly reward or punishment would

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1 Ḥusaynī Ṭihrānī, *Shining Sun*, pp. 276-277.

2 The threefold stages of meaning are deduced from Jawādī Āmulī.

3 Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī* (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1388/1968), 2:617, 3:301-302. Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1407/1986), 2:124.

manifest in your life in this world. Remind yourself that these rewards and punishments are not arbitrary, but they are traits and deeds which we take with ourselves.

(10) Set up a plan for yourself to memorize the Qur'an to the extent possible. When you come across a verse that speaks to your heart, record it (in writing and/or audio), and review it repeatedly as you go through your day. Also consider memorizing the short sūrahs toward the end of the Qur'an, as well as the terms used in the Book. Every year millions of students memorize thousands of difficult and technical terms to pass standardized tests and enter a university program, though there is no guarantee of worldly success. Why should we have any less determination when it comes to God's revelation, in which lies our eternal salvation?

(11) Do not overdose yourself. Do not take up a load that would break your back. The Prophet said, "Indeed this religion is robust. So enter it with moderation, and do not make the worship of your Lord hateful to yourself. Indeed the immoderate person—that is, one who picks up an excessive load—neither travels any distance, nor keeps their mount intact."[1] Developing a Qur'anic character is an inner transformation which requires persistence. Adopt a manageable course of study and practice that you can sustain on a regular basis. In this regard, *durability* is much more effective than *volume*. The Prophet said: "Take up acts of worship according to your ability. Indeed the Almighty God is not fed up unless you are fed up. The most beloved act to the Almighty God is what the person persists with, though it may be little."[2] Imam ʿAlī said, "A little that you persist with is more hopeful than a lot which you are fed up with."[3]

(12) For further engagement with the Qur'an, consider reading a multivolume commentary (*tafsīr*). This may be a long-term project that takes years, maybe a lifetime, but it is a very enriching experience. The advantage of taking up an extensive commentary is that it provides

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1 Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 2:87. Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrá* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1416/1995), 3:18-19.

2 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 1416/1995), 42:424. Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1412/1992), 2:811.

3 *Nahj al-balāghah*, Aphorisms 278, 444.

you with the socio-historical context of the verses. It also gives you more time to appreciate the verses with a slower pace. If you find the linguistic discussions of the Arabic terms too advanced for you, you can skip them. Those parts are dispensable for most readers. I have studied numerous commentaries written by authors from a wide range of backgrounds and denominations, from the early years of Islam up to the 21st century CE, and I can assure you that all their works can be an effective vehicle for learning the Qur'an. Do not let the author's credentials or orientation stop you from benefitting from their scholarship.

(13) Here is a secret that you will not find elsewhere: think about death frequently. To comprehend and absorb the Qur'an's message, you need to have a Qur'anic worldview, mindset and perspective. The Prophet said, "The hearts rust just as iron rusts." He was asked, "And what is their polish, O Messenger of God?" He replied, "Reciting the Qur'an and remembering death."[1] Between the two there is a deep affinity. The Qur'an's horizon extends far beyond this world into eternity. The weight and emphasis it gives to different subjects is exactly because of this perspective. By contemplating death and visiting the cemetery regularly, one will develop an appreciation for the Qur'an's point of view, and will not take its message lightly any more.

(14) After making some advancement in studying the Qur'an, one can draw much benefit from studying the holy texts of other traditions, such as the Bible, the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, the Dhammapada, and the Tao Te Ching. These texts have a revelatory and transformative nature, just like the Qur'an. By studying them, one not only will learn from their wisdom, but will also understand and appreciate the Qur'an much better. This experience adjusts one's priorities and criteria in deciding which aspects of religious teachings should be given a greater weight, and which parts are less central. It is vital that one takes up these books with the same intention that one approaches the Qur'an: as a book of guidance and light. That can be a determining factor in one's gain from these treasures.

(15) According to the narrations, it is strongly recommended that one

1 Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-balāghah* (Cairo: ʿĪsá al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1959), 10:23.

diversifies the chapters they recite in the prayers. Imam al-Riḍā said, "People have been ordered to recite the Qur'an in the prayer so that the Qur'an may not be neglected and lost, but may be preserved and taught. This way, it would not be forgotten or ignored."[1] In the case of obligatory prayers, the Shia ruling is that one must recite *at least* one complete sūrah, but it is permissible to recite parts of other sūrahs in addition to that . Not knowing the verses by heart should not stop one from doing so because it is permissible to read off the text during the prayer. We tend to apply much variety to our choice of food and travel destination. That is what makes every meal and vacation special and unique. No wonder we do not enjoy our prayers as much, and do not feel as excited about them, for they are done mechanically. We can easily and astutely prevent our prayers from becoming tedious and repetitive by using a variety of chapters, invocations and supplications over a week. Here are a few narrations which can help one come up with a daily or weekly plan for what chapters to read in their prayers:

(a) The Messenger of God used to recite Chapters 78, 88, 75 and other similar sūrahs[2] in his Morning Prayers (*fajr*). He would recite Chapters 87, 91, 88 and other similar sūrahs in his Noon Prayers (*ẓuhr*). He would recite Chapters 112, 110, 99 [and other similar sūrahs] in his Sunset Prayers (*maghrib*). His Evening Prayers (*ʿishāʾ*) were similar to his Noon Prayers, and his Afternoon Prayers (*ʿaṣr*) were similar to his Sunset Prayers.[3]

(b) The Messenger of God used to recite Chapter 56 and other similar sūrahs in his Morning Prayers.[4]

(c) The Messenger of God used to recite Chapter 50 and other similar sūrahs in his Morning Prayers.[5]

(d) The Prophet would recite Chapters 87 and 92 in his Noon

1 Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh* (Qum: Jamāʿat al-Mudarrisīn, 1404/ 1984), 1:310.

2 What is meant is similar in terms of length and content. The examples in the following narrations can help clarify this.

3 Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, 2:95-96.

4 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 34:5:04.

5 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 34:430. Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1:337.

> Prayers, and longer sūrahs in his Morning Prayers.[1]
> (e) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Recite comparable sūrahs in the Noon and Evening Prayers, and comparable sūrahs in the Afternoon and Sunset Prayers. But recite longer sūrahs in the Morning Prayers. In the Noon and Evening Prayers, recite Chapters 87, 91 and other similar sūrahs. In the Afternoon and Sunset Prayers, recite Chapters 110, 102 and other similar sūrahs. In the Morning Prayers, recite Chapters 78, 88, 75, 76 [and other similar sūrahs].[2]
> (f) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: On the night of Friday,[3] recite Chapters 62 and 112 in the Sunset Prayer, and Chapters 62 and 87 in the Evening Prayer. On Friday, recited Chapters 62 and 112 in the Morning Prayer, Chapters 62 and 63 in the Friday Prayer [at noon], and Chapters 62 and 112 in the Afternoon Prayer.[4]

It is also crucial to perform the five obligatory prayers in their optimum times. Reciting different chapters every few hours is a simple yet effective way of bringing the Qur'an to our lives. It is regrettable that most Shias pray only three times a day, while neither their Prophet nor their Imams used to do so. They combined two obligatory prayers very exceptionally, only to show its *permissibility*, but certainly not its *desirability*. This comes down to applying reason on the purpose of having *five* daily prayers, not to mention their clear appellations. Even at critical times of war, the Qur'an sanctions reducing the units and form of the prayer, but makes no mention of performing two prayers at once (4:101-102).[5] What is narrated from the Infallibles, saints and mystics in this regard—such as the importance of being punctual with the prayers, the tremendous spiritual effects of doing so, and their severe warnings against missing the proper timings—pertains to the five specific times, not three times. Imam al-Ṣādiq said, "Test

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1 Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1:337-338.

2 Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, 2:95.

3 This means Thursday night, since the night precedes the day in the Islamic calendar.

4 Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 3:425. Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, 3:5-6.

5 The exact prayer times according to Shia law coincide with the Sunni times. Therefore, Shias can safely use the prayer times produced by Sunni authorities. Imam ʿAlī has described the five times in *Nahj al-balāghah*, Letter 52.

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our Shias with the times of the prayer: how do they maintain them?"[1] It must be admitted that Sunni Muslims are much more adherent to the Ahl al-Bayt in this regard.

Tomorrow is a day
When the truth is proclaimed;
One who lived in illusion
Will be embarrassed and ashamed.[2]

In the case of optional prayers, one need not recite an entire chapter, but can recite any number of verses based on one's capacity to absorb. One can especially enjoy tremendous spiritual upliftment by doing so during the night and before dawn. That is how Imam ʿAlī described the Godwary (*al-muttaqūn*): "At night, they stand on their feet [in prayer], reciting parts of the Qur'an: intoning it with reflection, aggrieving their souls with it, and using it to explore cures for their ailments. When they come across a verse with a promise [of reward], they turn to it with longing, and their souls attend to it with yearning, as though it is before their eyes. When they come across a verse with a threat [of punishment], they open the ears of their hearts to it, as though they feel its roaring and groaning in their ears."[3]

(16) At the end of your session, take a moment to thank God for blessing you with the opportunity to sit with His Book, while you could have been busy with other occupations like most other people. Indeed the Qur'an is the best companion and the most intimate friend at times of loneliness—including our stages of utter isolation in the grave and the hereafter.

Security, pure wine, and a compassionate friend,
If you can have forever, I certainly recommend.
Hundreds of times I've realized that the world
And all its affairs are void at the end.

1 Ḥimyarī, *Qurb al-isnād* (Qum: Muʾassasat Āl al-Bayt, 1413/1993), p. 78; Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl* (Qum: Jāmiʿat al-Mudarrisīn, 1403/1983), 1:103.

2 Ḥāfiẓ, *ghazal* 133.

3 *Nahj al-balāghah*, Sermon 193.

I regret, to this point, I did not realize
The alchemy of happiness was friend, friend!
Go somewhere safe; make the most of your time
Hiding in ambush are bandits who intend
To cut off your life's journey and trend.[1]

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If you have a teacher or partner with whom you study, thank them explicitly. If you benefitted from someone who is dead or absent, dedicate the reward of your contemplation (which is no less than the reward of reciting Sūrah al-Fatiḥah) to their soul. It is also appropriate to recite one of the suggested supplications for after reciting the Qur'an, such as the following supplication by Imam al-Ṣādiq, which complements the one quoted above:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمنِ الرَّحِيمِ. اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي قَدْ قَرَأْتُ مَا قَضَيْتَ لِي مِنْ كِتَابِكَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلْتَ عَلَى نَبِيِّكَ الصَّادِقِ. فَلَكَ الْحَمْدُ رَبَّنَا. اللَّهُمَّ اجْعَلْنِي مِمَّنْ يُحِلُّ حَلَالَهُ وَ يُحَرِّمُ حَرَامَهُ وَ يُؤْمِنُ بِمُحْكَمِهِ وَ مُتَشَابِهِهِ وَ اجْعَلْهُ لِي أُنْساً فِي قَبْرِي وَ أُنْساً فِي حَشْرِي وَ اجْعَلْنِي مِمَّنْ تُرْقِيهِ بِكُلِّ آيَةٍ قَرَأَهَا دَرَجَةً فِي أَعْلَى عِلِّيِّينَ. آمِينَ رَبَّ الْعَالَمِينَ.

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In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful. O God, I have recited what You decreed for me of Your Book, which You sent down to Your truthful Prophet. We thank you for that, our Lord. O God, make me one of those who observe what it has made lawful, and avoid what it has made unlawful. Make me one of those who believe in both its decisive and ambiguous parts. Make it an intimate companion for me in my grave and upon my resurrection. Make me among those who rise a degree in the Highest Heaven for every verse that they recited. Amen, O Lord of the worlds.[2]

(17) Before you conclude your study, pause for a couple of minutes and make a covenant with your Lord. That is, make a covenant with the

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1 Ḥāfiẓ, *ghazal* 298.

2 Mufīd, *al-Ikhtiṣāṣ* (Beirut: Dār al-Mufīd, 1993), p. 141. Ṭabrisī, *Makārim al-akhlāq* (Qum: Manshūrat al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, 1412/1991), p. 343. Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 89:207. This supplication is also quoted in *Mafātīḥ al-jinān*, under the first day of Ramadan.

Highest Ideal which you aspire to. Think about your unwholesome habits according to your own understanding: things that you know *without the shadow of a doubt*, but you fail to live up to.[1] Set a standard for yourself and commit to it. Let that be your guiding principle for the following days or weeks. It helps to write this down and review it every morning until you have mastered it and have gone beyond the habit. If you do not have a personal agenda or calendar, this is the time to adopt one. Write the verse that you wish to memorize on it, and the Qur'anic message which you want to actualize in yourself. Make that the slogan and theme of your day. Then grade yourself at night (out of 5 or 10) on how you fared on those measures. It is best to do this on a daily basis, even if it is the same goal that carries from one day to the next.

It is also useful to set a reasonable system of reward and punishment for yourself, where you assess yourself every night before going to bed on your ability to live up to your commitments. The rewards and punishments you set must be mild yet meaningful in a way that they motivate and propel you forward, not weighty and deterrent in a way that they bog you down. Then the next time a temptation comes up, you will have the willpower to restrain yourself. Remember that your ego is as immature an impulsive as a child. That is why it requires both compassion (*jamāl*) and discipline (*jalāl*). You need proper incentives to harness your short-sighted instincts. Do not be shy to treat yourself with a delicacy as a reward, or withhold it as a penalty. If you do not take the initiative to motivate your ego, it will respond to other incentives—which may not be constructive. When the poster for an event says, "Refreshments will be served" in bold letters, it increases the attendance rate significantly (well, certainly during the breaks). And this also applies (maybe more) to pompous conferences for academics with PhDs—not to mention Islamic centers and gatherings. That is the level on which we operate, so do not give yourself too much credit. All this shows the divide between apparent knowledge and inner realization: it is not about how much we read and what degrees we receive. It also underlines that if we do not take responsibility for our spiritual growth and transformation, no one will. The mainstream is plunging headlong into the mundane. If you wish to stand out, you cannot take the same route.

1 This point was in part inspired by Jordan Peterson.

Setting a financial penalty for yourself or having to perform two units of prayer can also be effective strategies. In short: *So be wary of Allah as much as you can* (64:16). You show some determination on your part to improve yourself, and God's help will certainly be quick to save you. *If they are steadfast on the path [of Allah], We shall provide them with abundant water* (72:16); *indeed Allah's mercy is close to the good-doers* (7:56). Imam ʿAlī said, "Fear God to some degree, even though it may be little; and set a curtain between yourself and God even though it may be thin."[1]

Whispering to the wind, at dawn, my case,
A voice came saying, "Rely on God's grace."
Praying in the morning and weeping at night
Are the key to success and the treasure of delight.
So keep up the effort and continue this way;
From reaching the Beloved you're not far away.
This world is a hag, whose heart is without
Any mercy or regard for anyone throughout.
So do not expect its compassion a bit;
And don't invest your assets in it.
You are a phoenix that can fly very high, but alas,
You are entangled by greed to indulge in grass.
Your auspicious shadow you have chosen to cast
On something that's petty and should rather be passed.
If there is any profit in this market that's black,
It's for those who're content, although they lack;
O God, bless me with contentment and lack.[2]

The above steps can more generally serve as a manual for practical mysticism. Ultimately, religious knowledge is not a matter of reading or schooling, but a result of servitude, practice, and divine grace. This is most beautifully and practically explained in Imam al-Ṣādiq's instructions to ʿUnwān al-Baṣrī.[3] It is also through practice that one develops one's

1 *Nahj al-balāghah*, Aphorism 242; *Ghurar al-ḥikam*, no. 5837.

2 Ḥāfiẓ, *ghazal* 440.

3 For the full text and translation of the hadith, see Ḥusaynī Ṭihrānī, *Liberated Soul* (London: ICAS Press, 2017), pp. 141-147.

capacity to receive further stages of authentic knowledge, which is always transformative. The Prophet said, "One who learns and acts accordingly, God will teach them what they do not know."[1]

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First things first:
Seek less water,
But more of thirst;
Then for you from all sides
Water will burst.[2]

More specifically, we should give a higher priority to *abstinence* over *performance*. This is a very subtle point that marks the difference between ordinary knowledge and genuine wisdom (*ḥikmah*): Wisdom is not so much a matter of *acquiring positives*, but more about *avoiding negatives*. Hudhayfah b. Yamān was a special Companion of the Prophet who was known for esoteric knowledge and wisdom. He explained his secret as follows: "While the people used to ask the Messenger of God about what is good, I used to ask him about what is bad, lest it takes hold of me."[3]

This is also the essence of fasting. When Imam ʿAlī asked the Prophet about the best act in the month of Ramadan, the Prophet did not state an action, but abstention: "The best act in this month is *waraʿ* (restraint, abstinence) form what God has forbidden."[4] Accumulating abundant water in a leaky bucket is futile, but a little water in an intact receptacle is more lasting and promising. Scan your mental states and assess your external activities: To what extent do they help you expand your capacity, and to what extent do they keep you limited and tight?

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For years we've gathered wheat in storage;
Yet we've lost what we gathered of wheat and forage.
We should ask ourselves, "Where is our wheat?
There must be a rat that sneaks in to eat."

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1 Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr*, 2:192.

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2 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, vol. 3, line 3214.

3 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 38:316. Bukhārī, *aḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Cairo: Lajnah Iḥyāʾ Kutub al-Sunnah, 1410/1989), 6:53, 11:17. Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 3:1475. Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 28:42.

4 Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī* (Qum: Muʾassasat al-Biʿthah, 1417/1996), p. 155.

A rat has dug a tunnel from beneath;
Our crops are ruined for lacking a sheath.
There's no point cultivating the land before
You get rid of the rat and preserve your store.
Here's a narration from the Prophet, in defense:
"No prayer is complete without presence."[1]
Our wheat is our years of worship, but where?
It's missing because a rat is there.[2]

One application of this is refraining from anything that is unnecessary and irrelevant to us, such as much of our intrusions into what others do and say. Imam ʿAlī wrote to Ibn ʿAbbās, "Leave aside what does not concern you, because by leaving aside what does not concern you, you will arrive at what concerns you."[3] If someone tells you, "Mind your own business," do not feel offended; thank them for the reminder. Another important application is any resentment that we harbor against another person, regardless of what they have done. That blocks our receivers like sludge. When the light of guidance comes down, it dodges the heart which lodges a grudge. *Let them excuse and overlook. Do you not love that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful* (24:22).[4]

Whether it seems like faith or disbelief, either way,
Drop it on the way, if it leads you astray.
Whether pretty or ugly, you must suspend
Any form that blocks your way to your Friend.
The black bile of anger is Satanic thereof,
It's not congruent with the yellow bile of love;
Put down your grudges to rise above.
The Qur'an is a bride which will lift its niqab

1 Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 81:242, 259. Nūrī al-Ṭabrisī, *Mustadrak al-wasāʾil* (Qum: Muʾassasat Āl al-Bayt, 1408), 3:56-59, 4:106-109.

2 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, vol. 1, lines 378-383.

3 Ibn Shuʿbah al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-ʿūqūl* (Qum: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1404/1984), p. 218.

4 For a simple yet very effective way of eradicating our resentments in a systematic way, see *The Work* of Byron Katie.

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When the city of your faith is free from the mob.
No wonder that to you, the Qur'an is a sheet;
The sun, to the blind, is nothing but heat.[1]

Several attempts were made previously at translating volume 20 of *al-Mīzān* (volumes 39-40 of the English). While I acknowledge having consulted and benefitted from them, the current edition of this volume is a fresh translation of my own, for which I bear responsibility. I would especially like to thank Ali Khalfan for editing the manuscript thoroughly, and for his relentless direction of this translation project. May God accept this effort from us, yet treat us based on His grace, not according to our desert. May God forgive us and our parents, and not take us to task for our inadequacies.

My heart is not sound
And I've no deeds to boast,
But I'm arriving as a guest
Upon a Noble Host.
Taking provision
Is an insult to the utmost,
For I'm arriving as a guest
Upon a Noble Host.[2]

Tawus Raja
May 2019 (Ramadan 1440)
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1 Sanāʾī, *Dīvān-i Sanāʾī, qaṣāʾid*, no. 11.

2 Imam ʿAlī wrote these verses on the shroud of Salmān. Majlisī, *Zād al-maʿād* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī, 1423/2002), p. 575.

About the Author

The late Islamic scholar, thinker, and philosopher, ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī came from the celebrated Ṭabāṭabāʾī family of Tabriz. For the last three centuries, this family has produced generation after generation of renowned religious scholars in Azerbaijan (Iran). They are descendants of the second Imam, al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (peace be on both of them). The clan is also referred to with the title, al-Qāḍī.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad b. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī. ʿAllāmah was born in Tabriz on 29 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1321/17 March 1904. His father died in 1330 (1912). The orphaned child grew up in Tabriz, and after completing his religious education there, around 1341 (1923), he went to Najaf (Iraq), the most important center of Shia religious learning.

In Najaf, he began his higher studies with such illustrious scholars as Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nāʾīnī al-Gharawī (1277–1355/1860 or 1861–1936), the son of Shaykh al-Islām ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, and Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī (1296–1361/1878–1942), the son of al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Ḥasan, Muʿīn al-Tujjār.

These two were among the most prominent scholars in the Shia world. They were among the most prominent scholars not only in the fields of Shia jurisprudence and principles of jurisprudence, but in all Islamic subjects. Their opinions and theories are still followed today. Each founded his own school of thought and trained thousands of Shia scholars and jurists; and all the *marājiʿ al-taqlīd*[1] of the Shia world, to this day, are their students. Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī was a philosopher, unsurpassed in his time; a man of literature; and a poet in Arabic and Persian; he was a genius whose achievements made others look up to him as their ideal. Shaykh Nāʾīnī, with his bold opinions and decrees in the political and social life of the Muslim *umma*, has carved for himself a niche in history.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was much influenced by these two teachers,

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1 The highest authorities of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) whose rulings are followed by others.

particularly by al-Iṣfahānī, in the development of his thought and knowledge. A third influence was that of al-Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Jaʿfar Khwānsārī (1313– 80/1895 or 1896–1961), the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Mūsāwī, known as "the mathematician." ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was proud to have studied mathematics with him, and also wrote a book on higher mathematics, in which he applied some special theories of his teacher.

ʿAllāmah studied philosophy and metaphysics from al-Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Ḥusaynī Bādkūbahʾī; the latter was a student of al-Sayyid Riḍā, who studied with al-Sayyid Mūsā, a well-known teacher of philosophy and related subjects. In the fields of ethics and spirituality, ʿAllāmah received his training from his relatives, al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Qāḍī (1285–1366/1869–1947), a well-known scholar who established a school of spiritual and ethical training which still flourishes today.

All these influences combined to create in ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī a well-balanced academic and spiritual personality. He was a well-respected authority on religious subjects of jurisprudence and its fundamentals; a philosopher of independent views and new theories; and an inspired model of ethical and spiritual perfection. He not only taught morality, but also lived it. Yet it is also correct to state that his scholarship was overshadowed by his fame and prestige as a philosopher and a spiritual man.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī returned to Tabriz in 1353/1934, where he was welcomed as a religious scholar. There he spent his time teaching higher philosophy to willing disciples—but it was a small place for his talents. In 1364/1945 he migrated to Qum, the most important center of religious education in Iran. In Qum, he remained engaged in imparting the knowledge of ethics, philosophy, and the exegesis of the Qurʾan to those students who had already attained a high level of erudition. There he remained until his death on Sunday, 18 Muḥarram 1402/15 November 1981. May God bestow His mercy on him. Amen.

Many religious leaders of the present generation were and are among his students and disciples, the most famous being the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī (1338–99/1920–79).

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī's fame rests on his academic works—the most important being his great exegesis of the Qurʾan, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān.* It is said to be the foundation stone of the academic prestige which ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was accorded in the Muslim world.

Among his other works is *Uṣūl-i falsafah va ravish-i riʾalism* [Practical

and Philosophical Principles of Realism]. This book is a comparative study of Islamic philosophy and various modern anti-Islamic schools of thoughts, especially Marxism. His disciple, the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, annotated this work, thus making it easily accessible to the average man.

A third book, *Shiʿa dār Islām*, was first published in Persian; later it was published in English with the title, *Shiʾite Islam*. The ʿAllāmah wrote this book on the request of Professor Kenneth Morgan of Colgate University, to introduce Shiism to the West.

However, it is his *tafsīr, al-Mīzān* (published in 20 volumes in Arabic) which presents the true picture of the author's academic style and his way of thinking. In the preface to volume 1, the author outlines his plan, to explain the Qurʾan with the help of the Qurʾan itself. This he faithfully does, all the way through to the end of the *tafsīr*.

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Chapter 70

al-Maʿārij (The Elevations)

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Verses 1-18

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

سَأَلَ سَائِلٌ بِعَذَابٍ وَاقِعٍ ﴿١﴾ لِلْكَافِرِينَ لَيْسَ لَهُ دَافِعٌ ﴿٢﴾ مِنَ اللَّهِ ذِي الْمَعَارِجِ ﴿٣﴾
تَعْرُجُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ إِلَيْهِ فِي يَوْمٍ كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُ خَمْسِينَ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ ﴿٤﴾ فَاصْبِرْ
صَبْرًا جَمِيلًا ﴿٥﴾ إِنَّهُمْ يَرَوْنَهُ بَعِيدًا ﴿٦﴾ وَنَرَاهُ قَرِيبًا ﴿٧﴾ يَوْمَ تَكُونُ السَّمَاءُ كَالْمُهْلِ
﴿٨﴾ وَتَكُونُ الْجِبَالُ كَالْعِهْنِ ﴿٩﴾ وَلَا يَسْأَلُ حَمِيمٌ حَمِيمًا ﴿١٠﴾ يُبَصَّرُونَهُمْ ۚ يَوَدُّ
الْمُجْرِمُ لَوْ يَفْتَدِي مِنْ عَذَابِ يَوْمِئِذٍ بِبَنِيهِ ﴿١١﴾ وَصَاحِبَتِهِ وَأَخِيهِ ﴿١٢﴾ وَفَصِيلَتِهِ
الَّتِي تُؤْوِيهِ ﴿١٣﴾ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يُنْجِيهِ ﴿١٤﴾ كَلَّا ۖ إِنَّهَا لَظَىٰ ﴿١٥﴾ نَزَّاعَةً
لِلشَّوَىٰ ﴿١٦﴾ تَدْعُو مَنْ أَدْبَرَ وَتَوَلَّىٰ ﴿١٧﴾ وَجَمَعَ فَأَوْعَىٰ ﴿١٨﴾

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

(70:1) *A demander asked for a punishment inevitable,*
(70:2) *for the disbelievers there is no deflector for it,*
(70:3) *from Allah, Lord of the Stairways.*
(70:4) *The angels and the Spirit ascend to Him on a day whose span is fifty thousand years.*
(70:5) *So be patient, with a patience that is graceful.*
(70:6) *Indeed they see it to be far off,*
(70:7) *and We see it to be near.*
(70:8) *The day when the sky will be like molten copper,*
(70:9) *and the mountains like [tufts of carded] wool,*
(70:10) *and no friend will inquire about [the welfare of their] friend,*
(70:11) *[though] they will be placed within each other's sight. The guilty one will wish if he could ransom himself from the punishment*

of that day at the price of his children,
(70:12) *his spouse and his brother,*
(70:13) *his kin which had sheltered him*
(70:14) *and all those who are upon the earth, so that he may be delivered.*
(70:15) *Never! Indeed it is a blazing fire,*
(70:16) *which strips away the limbs.*
(70:17) *It calls him who turned back [from the truth] and forsook [it],*
(70:18) *and amassed [wealth] and hoarded [it].*

Introduction & Commentary

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 44 verses. The theme of this sūrah is a description of the Day of Resurrection, including the grievous punishment that await the disbelievers on that day. The sūrah begins by narrating that someone demanded God's punishment for the disbelievers. It says that this punishment, which is inevitable, is bound to occur in the near future, though the audience deem it to be far. The chapter then describes the characteristics of that day and the punishment in store therein, except for the believers who adhere to true beliefs and perform the good deeds that are made incumbent upon them.

The above theme of this sūrah resembles the Meccan sūrahs. However, some exegetes have claimed that the verse, *and in whose wealth there is a known right* (70:24), is Medinan. This makes sense because *a known right* apparently implies *zakāt* (poor-rate, prescribed religious tax), which was legislated in Medina, following the Prophet's migration from Mecca. If this verse is Medinan, it entails that the other fourteen verses in the same set should also be Medinan. That would include verses 70:22-35 (*except those who perform their daily prayers… They will be in gardens, held in honor*). This is based on the contextual unity and the mutual implication between these verses. Meanwhile, these verses are mentioned as an exception to a previous set of verses. Hence, if these verses are Medinan, then at least the three verses before them should also be Medinan: *Indeed man, was created fickle, given to anxiety… niggardly [when good comes his way*] (70:19-21). Furthermore, the verse *Now what is the matter with those who disbelieve that keep staring at you?* (70:36) is stated as a consequence of the previous verses, as indicated by the letter *fā*ʾ (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of the verse. And the verses that appear after it until the end of the sūrah are contextually consistent. This entails that from verse

36 onwards should have been revealed in Medina as well.

From another angle, the final part of the chapter is thematically commensurate with the description of the hypocrites who were around the Prophet in Medina: *from the left and the right in batches* (70:37). The hypocrites were apparent Muslims who had not fully embraced the commands that God had revealed to His Prophet. There are two verses in particular that are most pertinent to the hypocrites, as we shall discuss below: *Does each [man] among them hope to be admitted to the garden of bliss?* (70:38); *to replace [them] by [others] better than them* (70:41). We know that the hypocrites emerged in Medina rather than in Mecca. There is no problem with referring to the hypocrites as: *Those who disbelieve* (70:36). The same description is found in Sūrah al-Tawbah and elsewhere in the Qur'an.

Another indication is that as the exegetes have narrated, this chapter was revealed in response to the claim: *O Allah! If this be the truth in Your eyes, rain down upon us stones from the sky, or bring us a grievous punishment* (8:32). The context of that verse is clearly Medinan, not Meccan, as we discussed under the verse.

Meanwhile, it is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq that *a known right* (70:24) means a fixed share that is allocated voluntarily by the person, not the obligatory *zakāt*. It is also said that the exegetes unanimously agree that this chapter was revealed in Mecca. However, their consensus is not valid when there is clear evidence against it. Similarly, we cannot rely on the narration from Ibn ʿAbbās saying that this sūrah was revealed after Sūrah al-Ḥāqqah (69, which is Meccan).[1]

سَأَلَ سَائِلٌ بِعَذَابٍ وَاقِعٍ ﴿١﴾

(70:1) ***A demander asked*** **(saʾala, from suʾāl)** ***for a punishment*** **(bi-ʿadhāb)** ***inevitable,***

What is meant by *suʾāl* (question, request) here is "demand and appeal," because the verb is made transitive with the letter *bāʾ* (lit. with, by; here translated as "for"). Another similar usage is seen in the verse: *There they will call* (yadʿūna) *for every* (bi-kull) *fruit, in safety* (44:55) [where the verb *yadʿūna* (lit. call) means request]. Some exegetes have said that the letter

1 Therefore, the author's view is that this sūrah was revealed entirely in Medina. Apparently he wrote Meccan at the beginning of the sūrah only in order to reflect the conventional view held by the majority of exegetes. (Trans.)

bāʾ here implies special attention and deliberation. Others maintain that the letter *bāʾ* is *zāʾidah* (extra, redundant, semantically empty), added only to indicate emphasis. Either way, all these viewpoints imply that the request was out of disbelief and defiance.

Some exegetes have said that the letter *bāʾ* here is equivalent to the preposition *ʿan* (about, concerning), as also used in the verse: *So ask someone who* (fa-isʾal bihi) *is well aware about him* (25:59). However, the letter *bāʾ* in verse 25:59 does not mean *ʿan*. Further, the context of the following verses—particularly the verse *So be patient, with a patience that is graceful* (70:5)—is not commensurate with *suʾāl* in the sense of inquiry. It is not a mere request for knowledge and clarification.

The verse reports a defiant disbeliever's demand for punishment. The adjective mentioned for the punishment—*inevitable*—shows in a pejorative way that the request is indeed granted. Another description of this punishment is given in the next verse: *there is no deflector for it* (70:2).

لِلْكَافِرِينَ لَيْسَ لَهُ دَافِعٌ ۝٢

(70:2) *for the disbelievers there is no deflector for it,*

This verse presents two qualities for the punishment mentioned in the last verse: (1) it is *for the disbelievers*; and (2) *there is no deflector for it*.[1] The meaning of the first two verses is: "A demander from amongst the disbelievers asked God to send down a punishment which shall indeed befall. There is no escape from this punishment. It does not fail to strike the disbelievers whether they ask for it or not." This positive response to their request implies derision and humiliation.

مِنَ اللَّهِ ذِي الْمَعَارِجِ ۝٣

(70:3) *From Allah, Lord of the Stairways* (al-maʿārij).

This verse could connect to either *deflector* (70:2) or *punishment* (70:1). Therefore there are two possible meanings for it: (1) He asked for a punishment that no one is authorized from God to divert it. Obviously, if anyone were to deflect God's punishment, it could only be someone from Him. (2) He asked for a punishment from God.

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1 This verse is a complete sentence with an independent meaning, but this independent meaning is itself an attribute for the aforementioned punishment. (Trans.)

Maʿārij is the plural of *maʿraj*. Here is a list of suggested interpretations for it by the exegetes:

(1) *Maʿārij* is synonymous with *maṣāʿid* (means of ascension), which means "ladders." It refers to the stages traversed by the angels in their ascension toward God. In fact, the following verse interprets what is meant here: *The angels and the Spirit ascend to Him on a day…* (70:4). God has a hierarchy of steps and stations in the angelic realm (*malakūt*), through which the angels and the Spirit ascend toward God. This will be according to their proximity to Him; These stations are not merely conventional or mentally constructed positions, but they represent the existential proximity of the angels to the Absolute.

(2) *Maʿārij* are the stages of ascent of true beliefs and righteous deeds, as per the verses: *To Him ascends the good word and He elevates righteous conduct* (35:10); *Rather, it is your Godwariness that reaches Him* (22:37).

(3) *Maʿārij* are the stations of divine proximity, which the believers attain through their faith and righteous conduct, as the Qur'an says: *They have ranks with Allah, and Allah sees best what they do* (3:163); *They shall have ranks near their Lord, forgiveness and a noble provision* (8:4); *Raiser of ranks, Lord of the Throne* (40:15).

Comment: The last two interpretations can also be reduced to the first one. The stages mentioned here are real existential positions, not mental constructs and social conventions.

تَعْرُجُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ إِلَيْهِ فِي يَوْمٍ كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُ خَمْسِينَ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ ﴿٤﴾

(70:4) ***The angels and the Spirit ascend to Him on a day whose span is fifty thousand years.***

Given the verses that follow, *a day* here is the Day of Resurrection. As some exegetes have explained, that day is described as being fifty thousand years in the sense that if it were to be projected onto this world and mapped to the realm of time, it would last fifty thousand years of this world.

The ascention of the angels and Spirit toward God on that day is part of the return of everything to Him. The Day of Resurrection is a day when the intermediaries and instruments will disappear, and that is exactly the reality of the angels: they serve as intermediaries appointed over the events of this world. As God severs the causal connections between the entities in creation, the angels will return to God and ascend to their stations. That

is when they will surround the divine Throne, as God says: a*nd you will see the angels surrounding the Throne* (39:75); *on the day when the Spirit and the angels stand in an array* (78:38).

It is clear that the Spirit (*al-rūḥ*) in this verse is that which is of the divine command: *Say, "The Spirit is of the command of my Lord"* (17:85). The Spirit is a being other than the angels, as apparently attested in the verse: *He sends down the angels with the Spirit of His command* (16:2). Therefore, we should disregard the view that the Spirit in this verse is Gabriel. Yes, Gabriel is called "the Trustworthy Spirit" (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*) and "the Holy Spirit" (*rūḥ al-qudus*): *brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit upon your heart* (26:193-194); *Say, "The Holy Spirit has brought it down duly from your Lord"* (16:102). However, both of these titles of Gabriel are qualified [by either Trustworthy or Holy], while the current verse says the Spirit (*al-rūḥ*) in an unqualified form. The two are not equivalent.

فَاصْبِرْ صَبْرًا جَمِيلًا ۝٥

(70:5) ***So be patient, with a patience that is graceful.***

Since the abovementioned request of punishment was out of arrogance and defiance, here God orders the Prophet to be patient. "Graceful patience" means such patience that is free from any sense of fret, complaint or agitation. This command is then justified by saying that the promised day—with its punishment—shall come soon.

إِنَّهُمْ يَرَوْنَهُ بَعِيدًا ۝٦ وَنَرَاهُ قَرِيبًا ۝٧

(70:6-7) ***Indeed they see it to be far off, and We see it to be near.***

The two pronouns "it" can refer to either the punishment, or the Day of Resurrection (in which the punishment will befall). The first possibility is corroborated by the following verse: *The day when the sky will be like molten copper* (70:8). "Seeing" here means "belief," used metaphorically. "Far" means "far from possibility." Demanding God's punishment out of arrogance against His religion and rejection of His command is certainly incompatible with belief in the hereafter, even if the person affirms it verbally. God sees it [the punishment, or the day] near, which refers to His knowledge of its occurrence. "Anything that is bound to come is [practically] near."[1]

1 This is a famous Prophetic narration and proverb that is reported in several

These two verses justify the previous command to have a graceful patience. Indeed one would more easily endure difficulties and put up with hardships if one is assured that an improvement is in prospect, and is constantly mindful of it. The verses are effectively saying: "Despite their arrogance and defiant requests of punishment, you bear patiently. Do not mix your graceful patience with complaint or restlessness, because indeed We know that their punishment is very near, though they imagine it to be far off. And what We know never differs from the reality. Rather, what We know is exactly that reality."

يَوْمَ تَكُونُ السَّمَاءُ كَالْمُهْلِ ﴿٨﴾

(70:8) ***The day when the sky will be like molten copper*** **(kal-muhl),**

Muhl means "molten metal," such as molten copper or gold. Other suggested definitions are: (1) "grease residue"; (2) "inferior tar." Given the context of the verses, *the day* in this verse identifies the time of *a punishment inevitable* (70:1).

وَتَكُونُ الْجِبَالُ كَالْعِهْنِ ﴿٩﴾

(70:9) ***And the mountains like [tufts of carded] wool*** **(kal-ʿihn),**

The word *ʿihn* denotes wool. Perhaps it specifically means "carded wool" here, based on the verse: a*nd the hills will be like carded wool* (101:5). Some have defined *ʿihn* as "red wool." Others have suggested "dyed wool," because hills are of different colors: *And in the mountains are stripes white and red, of diverse hues, and [others] pitch black* (35:27).

وَلَا يَسْأَلُ حَمِيمٌ حَمِيمًا ﴿١٠﴾

(70:10) ***And no friend*** **(ḥamīm)** ***will inquire about [the welfare of their] friend,***

Ḥamīm means "a close friend [or relative] that is kind and caring toward one." This verse depicts the hardships of that day [of Resurrection]. Everyone will be so preoccupied with themselves that they will totally forget their friends. They will not even inquire about their close friends because of their personal problems.

يُبَصَّرُونَهُمْ ۚ يَوَدُّ الْمُجْرِمُ لَوْ يَفْتَدِي مِنْ عَذَابِ يَوْمِئِذٍ بِبَنِيهِ ﴿١١﴾ وَصَاحِبَتِهِ

Sunni and Shia sources. See hadith number 4 under verses 76:23-31. (Trans.)

وَأَخِيهِ ﴿١٢﴾ وَفَصِيلَتِهِ الَّتِي تُؤْوِيهِ ﴿١٣﴾ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يُنْجِيهِ ﴿١٤﴾

(70:11-14) ***[Though] they will be placed within each other's sight.*** **(yubaṣṣarūnahum, from ibṣār)** ***The guilty one will wish*** **(yawaddu, from mawaddah)** ***if he could ransom*** **(yaftadī, from iftidāʾ)** ***himself from the punishment of that day at the price of his children, his spouse and his brother, his kin*** **(faṣīlatihi)** ***which had sheltered him and all those who are upon the earth, so that he may be delivered.***

Given the context of the verses, the subject and object here are "friends," mentioned in the last verse. The verb *ibṣār* (to be shown) is ditransitive, and synonymous with *irāʾah* (to make someone see something) and *īḍāḥ* (to clarify something to someone). The meaning is: "Everyone is shown their close friends and relatives, yet they are so preoccupied with their own plight that they do not inquire about their friends."

This single term (*yubaṣṣarūnahum*) is an independent sentence which stands on its own. It is stated as a reply to an assumed question. It is as if when the Qur'an says: a*nd no friend will inquire about [the welfare of their] friend* (70:10), a question is raised: "Do these friends see each other on that day?" So the verse replies: *they will be placed within each other's sight*. Another possibility is that this term serves as an adjective for "friend" (*ḥamīman*) at the end of the last verse.[1]

Here are three other interpretations for the subject and object here, suggested by some exegetes: (1) The angels will be shown to the disbelievers. (2) The believers will be shown the disbelievers who opposed them in punishment, and this will be soothing to them. (3) The disbelievers will be shown their chiefs and leaders who misguided them. However, all of these are implausible views, without any evidence to support them.

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> The word *mawaddah* is homonymous with two meanings: *tamannī* (to wish, to desire, to yearn) and *maḥabbah* (to love, to like). For instance, *wadadtuhu* is used to mean "I desire it" and also "I love him."
>
> *Iftidāʾ* (to redeem, to ransom) means "to free something by paying something in exchange for it."

1 The meaning would be: "No friend will inquire about the welfare of their friend within their sight." (Trans.)

A *qabīlah* (tribe) is a group of people who share a common ancestor. A subset of that with a more recent and proximate common forefather is called a *faṣīlah* (clan, kin).

Faṣīlah is a subset of a tribe, distinguished by a more immediate father than the shared ancestor of the entire tribe.

Concerning *mawaddah*, it could be that its main and original meaning is "love," and it implies "wish" as a component of that (called *taḍammun* and *taḍmīn*). According to some exegetes, *faṣīlah* means close relatives from whom one has emerged (*faṣala*), such as one's closest fathers.

The theme of these verses is escalating the previous discussion by saying, "Not only that, but also…" The punishment of the sinners will be so grievous on that day that they will wish they could pay in ransom their loved ones and closest relatives, such as their children, their spouses, their brothers, their entire clan, and everyone on the face of the earth. So not only they will not have the occasion to inquire about their friends, but they will wish they could hand them over only to redeem themselves.

Yawaddu means *yatamannā* (wishes, desires, yearns). *Al-mujrim* (the guilty one, the sinner) is one who is immersed in *ijrām* (wrongdoing, sin, iniquity), which is more general in scope than a disbeliever.

… if he could ransom himself from the punishment of that day…: This sentence indicates what the guilty one will wish. It serves as the object of the verb *yawaddu* (will wish). *His children* are the most beloved individuals to him. *His spouse* is one with whom he found peace and used to rest. Perhaps he gave priority to her over his own parents. *His brother* was his equal [in birth] who used to support him. *His kin* are his closest relatives *which had sheltered him*. To all of this is added:

… and all those who* (man) *are upon the earth…: The Arabic particle *man* (who) here indicates all intelligent beings. *So that he may be delivered*: This is the meaning of *iftidāʾ* (to ransom something for another).

كَلَّآ ۖ إِنَّهَا لَظَىٰ ﴿١٥﴾ نَزَّاعَةً لِّلشَّوَىٰ ﴿١٦﴾ تَدْعُو مَنْ أَدْبَرَ وَتَوَلَّىٰ ﴿١٧﴾ وَجَمَعَ فَأَوْعَىٰ ﴿١٨﴾

(70:15-18) *Never* (kallā)*! Indeed it is a blazing fire* (laẓá)*, which strips away* (nazzāʿah) *the limbs* (lil-shawá)*. It calls him who turned back* [from the truth] *and forsook* [it]*, and amassed* [wealth] *and hoarded* [it] (fa-awʿá, from īʿāʾ).

Kallā (never) denotes rejection and prohibition. The pronoun "it"—in *Indeed it is*—refers to hell or the fire on that day. It is called *laẓá* since

it flares and flames (*tatalaẓẓá*). *Nazzāʿah* is an intensive form derived from the verb *nazʿ*, which means *iqtilāʿ* (to strip away, to extirpate). *Īʿāʾ* means placing something—like wealth—in a *wiʿāʾ* (container, receptacle). Al-Rāghib says:

> "*Shawá* means the peripheries, such as the limbs. *Ramāhu fa-ashawāhu* means that he shot at him and struck his limbs (*shawá*)."

Kallā (never, by no means) rejects the sinners' desire to be delivered from punishment through ransom. The next verses state the reason for this rejection: because *it is a blazing fire…* (70:15-18). That is: They cannot ransom themselves in anyway whatsoever because the hell is a blazing fire which burns up the limbs and seeks the guilty ones in order to punish them.

Indeed it is a blazing fire: That fire is marked by being ablaze. This is a quality which hellfire never ceases to have. It is a fire which cannot not be extinguished.

Which strips away the limbs: Hellfire is also marked by burning the limbs and destroying the organs of the people. Its excruciating effects cannot be averted.

It calls him who turned back [from the truth] and forsook [it], and amassed [wealth] and hoarded [it]: Hellfire seeks those who turn away from the divine call to believe in God and worship Him; those who amass wealth, store them in treasures, and refuse to give them in charity to the needy and the deprived. This meaning is commensurate with the following exceptive clauses, which refer to prayer and charity [70:22-25].

Examining Narrations

(1) Imam al-Ṣādiq narrated from his fathers: The Messenger of God appointed ʿAlī [as his successor] and said, "For whomever I am a master, so shall ʿAlī be his master" (*man kuntu mawlāhu fa-ʿAlī mawlāhu*). The news of this spread in all towns.

Nuʿmān b. Ḥārith al-Fahrī came to the Prophet and said, "You commanded us to testify that there is no god but Allah and you are God's Messenger. You commanded us to [observe] the jihad, the pilgrimage, the fasting, the prayer and the almsgiving. We obliged [to all these]. But you were still not satisfied unless you appointed this boy [as your successor over us], and said, 'For

whomever I am a master, so shall ʿAlī be his master.' Is this something from yourself or a command from God?"

"By Allah besides Whom there is no god," the Prophet replied, "this is indeed from God."

Nuʿmān b. Ḥārith turned away and said, "*O Allah, if this be the truth from You, rain down upon us stones from the sky* (8:32)." So God threw a stone on his head, which cost his life. Then God revealed: *A demander asked for a punishment inevitable* (70:1).[1]

Author's comment: This hadith is narrated through more than one chain of transmission in Shia sources. Some scholars have rejected it as fabricated on the basis that the chapter was revealed in Mecca. However, we already discussed the problem with the chapter being Meccan.

(2) Concerning verse 70:1 (*A demander asked…*) Ibn ʿAbbās said: That was Naḍr b. al-Ḥārith who said: "*O Allah, if this be the truth from You, rain down upon us stones from the sky* (8:32)."[2]

(3) Concerning verse 70:1 (*A demander asked…*) al-Suddī said: The verse was revealed in Mecca about Naḍr b. al-Ḥārith, who said: "*O Allah, if this be the truth from You…* (8:32)." His punishment came in the Battle of Badr.[3]

Author's comment: The same idea has been narrated from [early exegetes] other than al-Suddī. According to some Sunni narrations, the person who said, *O Allah, if this be the truth from You…* (8:32) was al-Ḥārith b. ʿAlqamah, who was from ʿAbd al-Dār [tribe]. Other accounts say that it was Abū Jahl b. Hishām who asked this on the day of Badr. This means that the current chapter must have been revealed in Medina. What is certain is that the chapter was revealed *after* the revelation of the verse: *O Allah, if this be the truth from You…* (8:32). We also had a discussion on the theme and connection of the verses.[4]

(4) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "Lo! Reckon the deeds of yourselves before

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Sayyid Abū al-Ḥamad, on the authority of al-Ḥākim Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥaskānī, up to Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Fāryābī, ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, al-Nasāʾī, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Ḥākim (who has authenticated it) and Ibn Mardawayh.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

4 See the author's "Introduction" above, where he favors the view that the chapter is Medinan. (Trans.)

God reckons your deeds, for indeed there will be fifty stops on the Day of Resurrection, and each stop will be like a thousand years of your measure [in this world]." Then, he recited the verse: *On a day whose span is fifty thousand years* (70:4).[1]

(5) Once the Messenger of God was told [concerning verse 70:4], "Such a long day it shall be!" But the Prophet replied, "By the One Who has the life of Muḥammad in His hand, it will be discounted for the believers, such that it will be lighter for them than an obligatory daily prayer that they prayed in this world."[2]

(6) Concerning *The day when the sky will be like molten copper* (al-muhl) (70:8) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It [*al-muhl*] means molten lead and copper. The sky will melt in like manner.

(7) Concerning *they will be placed within each other's sight* (70:11) Imam al-Bāqir said: They will recognize one another, but will not inquire about each other['s well-being].[3]

(8) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *which strips away the limbs* (70:16) says: "It [hellfire] will pluck out their eyes and roast their faces black." *It calls him who turned back [from the truth] and forsook [it]* (70:17): "It [hellfire] will drag them [the sinners] toward itself."

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1 Al-Ṭūsī's *al-Amālī*, via its chain of narration. The same idea is also narrated from the Imam in *Rawḍat al-kāfī*, on the authority of Ḥafṣ b. Ghiyāth.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī. This is also narrated from the Prophet in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, from several collections of hadith, on the authority of Abū Saʿīd.

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

Verses 19-35

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ خُلِقَ هَلُوعًا ﴿١٩﴾ إِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ جَزُوعًا ﴿٢٠﴾ وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الْخَيْرُ مَنُوعًا ﴿٢١﴾
إِلَّا الْمُصَلِّينَ ﴿٢٢﴾ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَىٰ صَلَاتِهِمْ دَائِمُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾ وَالَّذِينَ فِي أَمْوَالِهِمْ حَقٌّ
مَعْلُومٌ ﴿٢٤﴾ لِلسَّائِلِ وَالْمَحْرُومِ ﴿٢٥﴾ وَالَّذِينَ يُصَدِّقُونَ بِيَوْمِ الدِّينِ ﴿٢٦﴾ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ مِنْ
عَذَابِ رَبِّهِمْ مُشْفِقُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾ إِنَّ عَذَابَ رَبِّهِمْ غَيْرُ مَأْمُونٍ ﴿٢٨﴾ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِفُرُوجِهِمْ
حَافِظُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾ إِلَّا عَلَىٰ أَزْوَاجِهِمْ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ غَيْرُ مَلُومِينَ ﴿٣٠﴾
فَمَنِ ابْتَغَىٰ وَرَاءَ ذَٰلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْعَادُونَ ﴿٣١﴾ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمَانَاتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ
رَاعُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِشَهَادَاتِهِمْ قَائِمُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَىٰ صَلَاتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ
﴿٣٤﴾ أُولَٰئِكَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ مُكْرَمُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(70:19) *Indeed man has been created covetous [to attain to perfection].*
(70:20) *fretful when evil befalls him*
(70:21) *and grudging when good comes his way*
(70:22) *except those who pray,*
(70:23) *those who are constant with their prayer,*
(70:24) *and in whose wealth there is a known right*
(70:25) *for the beggar and the deprived,*
(70:26) *and who affirm the Day of Retribution,*
(70:27) *and those who are apprehensive of the punishment of their Lord*
(70:28) *indeed the punishment of their Lord is not to be felt secure of*
(70:29) *and those who guard their private parts*
(70:30) *except from their spouses and their slave women, for then they are not blameworthy;*
(70:31) *but whoever seeks beyond that, it is they who are the transgressors,*
(70:32) *and those who keep their trusts and covenants,*
(70:33) *and those who stand by their testimonies,*
(70:34) *and those who are watchful on their prayers.*
(70:35) *They will be in gardens, held in honor.*

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Introduction & Commentary

The previous verses talked about turning away from the truth and hoarding wealth [70:17-18], which eventually lead one to a blazing fire that strips away the limbs [70:15-16]. These verses identify the primary cause for such evil behavior. This cause is a trait called *halaʿ* (covetousness, self-interest). It was according to God's wisdom that humans should be created with this quality, so that they may be able to achieve their good and happiness. However, people abuse it against themselves instead of using it in the way of their [real and eternal] happiness. As a result, this trait will lead them to eternal damnation, except for those who believe and do righteous deeds, who *will be in gardens, held in honor* (70:35).

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ خُلِقَ هَلُوعًا ﴿١٩﴾ إِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ جَزُوعًا ﴿٢٠﴾ وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الْخَيْرُ مَنُوعًا ﴿٢١﴾

(70:19-21) ***Indeed man has been created covetous* (halūʿan).** ***Fretful when evil befalls him, and grudging when good comes his way.***

Hulūʿ is an adjective derived from the root *halaʿ*, which means "intense covetousness." It is also said that its meaning is to be found in the next two verses, where *halūʿ* is defined as being "impatient in the face of misfortune" [70:20] and "niggardly at times of fortune" [70:21]. This is a solid interpretation, supported by the context. The strong self-interest which is inherent in humankind is covetousness for things that one deems to be good and beneficial for oneself personally. It is not an unqualified greed for everything, whether beneficial or harmful. Nor is it greed over all good things, regardless of their relation to the person in particular. The implication of such self-centred greed for personal gain is to become anxious and restless in the face of evil, since that is the opposite of good. Similarly, such covetousness requires one to not miss the chance to grab any good and possess it for oneself as opposed to leaving it for others, unless the person reckons that letting go of it is better and more beneficial for themselves. In other words, what is mentioned in the next two verses—being restless in the face of misfortune [70:20] and being possessive about fortune [70:21]—are implications of this trait of intense covetousness (*halaʿ*).

This sense of intense self-interest is in fact a branch of self-love, which is hard-wired in humankind. This quality is by no means a vice in and of itself. How could it be a vice when it is the only means that leads us to our happiness and perfection? It becomes a vice when we do not conduct it in the right direction; when we pursue it with no regard for propriety and

fairness. Therefore, it is just like any other of our psychological qualities: If we exercise them in moderation, they are blessings and virtues; but if we go beyond the limits—if we satisfy them either too much or too little—they turn into vices.

Infants have an instinct for what is good or bad for them, based on their appetite, which at the time is unbridled and knows no limits. If they face any pain or hardship, they become restless and disturbed. They oppose anything or anyone that prevents their hold over any good in any way they can, such as weeping and screaming. This continues until they reach intellectual maturity and discernment, where they can distinguish between truth and falsehood, and good and bad. That is when they become conscious of their cognition. At that point, many instances of good, bad, truth and falsehood reverse for them. They will realize that what they imagined to be good was in fact bad for them, and vice versa.

If they continue pursuing their desires, cling to fulfilling their lusts, and divert themselves from seeking the truth, their hearts will be sealed. As a result, they will defy any truth that they encounter, and will trespass on the rights of anyone. This is inevitable unless they are saved by a divine favor and grace, which will direct their greed and desires toward the cause of truth. Then they will not turn away arrogantly from any right that they encounter; nor will they withhold anyone from enjoying what is rightfully theirs.

Humans are equipped with this intense covetousness for good from the time of their birth. This is a quality of perfection for them because it prompts them to seek what is benefical to them and avoid what is harmful. God says: *And indeed he [man] has an intense love for good* (100:8). Later on, they are equipped with another tool as they mature, and that is the power of reason, through which they perceive the realities of things as they are. Thus they can discern true beliefs and good actions. Initially, their intense self-interest consisted of being fretful in the face of misfortune, and possessive in the face of fortune. However, with the new development [of their reason], their intense self-interest will be directed at being agitated for otherworldly evil—which is sin—and grabbing the real good, which is hastening for God's forgiveness and eternal blessings. As with worldly evil and good, such mature individuals will not step beyond the boundaries set by God, which is to have patience in calamities, patience over [the difficulty of] obedience, and patience against [the pleasure of] disobedience. This is a quality of perfection for humankind.

Otherwise, if people turn away from what is perceived by their reason and their innate disposition (*fiṭrah*); if they persist with pursuing their desires; if they embrace falsehood; if they infringe on the rights of others; and if they recognize no limits in their greed for good—then it means that they have turned God's blessing to damnation. God gave them an instinct through which they could achieve the good of both worlds, but they are now using it as a means to damnation and loss. This will lead them to turn away from the truth and forsake it, and amass wealth and hoard it, as mentioned in the previous verses [70:17-18].

Given the above explanations, the trait of covetousness discussed in these verses should be attributed to the creation of humankind. The verses involve a tone of condemnation of humankind for this quality, while elsewhere God says: *He Who perfected everything that He created* (32:7). There is no contradiction here because the rebuke is on the part of people due to their mismanagement, not on the part of God. This is like all other qualities that God has bestowed upon humankind: they are blessings which can turn into damnation due to the wrong choices of the people.

Al-Zamakhsharī has taken another approach to answer the apparent contradiction mentioned above. Here is a summary of his view:

> "Creation" here is not meant literally, but it is used as a figure of speech. The meaning is: "Since humankind are so obsessed with these qualities of fretfulness and possessiveness, it is *as if* they are hard-wired and created with these qualities. *As though* these are involuntary features that are fixed upon them." This means that the verses only present an analogy, not that these qualities are innately created in humankind by God. Evidence for this is that the verses involve a tone of rebuke, while God would never rebuke His own acts. Not to mention that the verses below exclude the believers who combat against their egos and liberate themselves from the shackles of both fretfulness and possessiveness [hence they cannot be something inherent in all humankind.

This is not a plausible explanation, because in and of itself, the quality of intense covetousness is a virtue and blessing created by God. The only thing is that humans take it out of its state of virtue and transform it into a vice. They change God's blessing to damnation. The rebuke in the verses pertains to the wrong choice and mismanagement of humankind, not to the action and creation of God. Also, the exclusion of the believers does not mean that they lack this inherent quality, but it means that

they maintain it in its pristine state, instead of distorting it to become a vice and damnation.

Other exegetes have explained the above contradiction by saying that the exception below [in 70:22] is an unconnected exception. The problem with this view should be obvious.[1]

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إِلَّا الْمُصَلِّينَ ﴿٢٢﴾

(70:22) ***Except those who pray,***

This exception refers to "man" who was described as covetous [70:19]. Among all the acts listed below, prayer is the first one to be mentioned, which shows the merit of the prayer as the best of deeds. Moreover, prayer plays a significant role in curbing the vice of covetousness. The Qur'an says: *Indeed the prayer prevents indecencies and wrongs* (29:45).

الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَىٰ صَلَاتِهِمْ دَائِمُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

(70:23) ***Those who are constant with their prayer,***

The verse does not say: "the prayer" in an unqualified form, but it says: "*their* prayer." This means that no matter what happens, they are committed to performing their prayers [in their due times], not that they are always performing the prayer [physically]. The verse shows that an act will bear full fruits only when one persists with it steadfastly.

وَالَّذِينَ فِي أَمْوَالِهِمْ حَقٌّ مَعْلُومٌ ﴿٢٤﴾ لِلسَّائِلِ وَالْمَحْرُومِ ﴿٢٥﴾

(70:24-25) ***And in whose wealth there is a known right for the beggar*** **(lil-sāʾil)** ***and the deprived*** **(al-maḥrūm),**

Sāʾil means "a needy person who asks for help." *Maḥrūm* is "a needy person who honorably refrains from asking." Some exegetes have interpreted this as the obligatory *zakāt* (poor-rate, religious tax). However, it is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq that "the known right" is not the obligatory *zakāt*, but it is a known share [of their wealth] that they set aside to give to the poor. There is some evidence in the verse which supports this narration. The recipients of the obligatory *zakāt* are not limited to the needy and the deprived—which are apparently the only intended recipients

1 An unconnected exception would be clearly contrary to the consistent context and connection of the verses. (Trans.)

here—but they are as listed elsewhere in the Qur'an: *Charities are only for the poor and the needy, and those employed to collect them, and those whose hearts are to be reconciled, and for [the freedom of] the slaves and the debtors, and in the way of Allah, and for the traveler. [This is] an ordinance from Allah, and Allah is Omniscient, All-Wise* (9:60).

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وَالَّذِينَ يُصَدِّقُونَ بِيَوْمِ الدِّينِ ﴿٢٦﴾

(70:26) ***And who affirm*** **(yuṣaddiqūna)** ***the Day of Retribution,***

Since the context of these verses is a numeration of righteous deeds, what is meant here is "practical affirmation" not merely "a belief." It means their way of life and practice in this world clearly shows that they are fully conscious that there will be retribution for whatever they do. Their actions are the actions of one who knows that if they do good, they will see good; and if they do evil, they will see evil. The verb *yuṣaddiqūna* (affirm, confirm) is in the present tense, which implies persistence and continuation. They are consistently conscious and mindful of God in any condition that they may be. Thus they fulfill what pleases Him, and refrain from what He disapproves.

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وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ مِنْ عَذَابِ رَبِّهِمْ مُشْفِقُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

(70:27) ***And those who are apprehensive*** **(mushfiqūn)** ***of the punishment of their Lord***

Mushfiqūn is synonymous with *khāʾifūn* (apprehensive, fearful, anxious). Their fear of God's punishment is like their confirmation of the Day of Retribution, in that both are descriptive of their actions. What is meant here is practical awe: an apprehension that appears in one's behavior. Their apprehension of God's punishment, despite their good deeds and efforts, shows that they are not confident of their righteous deeds. Despite their numerous virtues, they are still concerned about God's punishment. Feeling secure is not congruent with apprehensiveness.

God's punishment is a consequence of disobedience. Therefore, genuine obedience is the only means of deliverance from it. Nevertheless, one cannot be confident with oneself because one has no control over anything except to the extent that is authorized by God. He is the only One Who is a possessor [of everyone and everything] but is not possessed [by anyone or anything]. He says: *Say, "Who can avail anything against Allah?"* (5:17). This is the basis for why one should be apprehensive of God's punishment.

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It is true that God has promised to deliver His obedient servants [from His punishment], and that He would never break His promise.[1] However, these promises do not restrict His omnipotence. Therefore, no one may feel secure in the sense that He would no longer be able to act otherwise. Despite His promises, one should still maintain a sense of awe with respect to His absolute power. That is why even though God explicitly says that the angels are immaculate, He describes them as: *They fear their Lord above them, and do what they are commanded* (16:50). Similarly, concerning His prophets He says: *They fear Him, and fear no one except Allah* (33:39). Likewise, here He describes the believers as being apprehensive, while a few verses below He affirms: *They will be in gardens, held in honor* (70:35).

إِنَّ عَذَابَ رَبِّهِمْ غَيْرُ مَأْمُونٍ ﴿٢٨﴾

(70:28) ***Indeed the punishment of their Lord is not to be felt secure of***

This verse justifies their apprehension of God's punishment. It says that they are rightful in being fearful of it. We explained why such fear is justifiable under the last verse.

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِفُرُوجِهِمْ حَافِظُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾ إِلَّا عَلَىٰ أَزْوَاجِهِمْ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ غَيْرُ مَلُومِينَ ﴿٣٠﴾ فَمَنِ ابْتَغَىٰ وَرَاءَ ذَٰلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْعَادُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

(70:29-31) ***And those who guard their private parts, except from their spouses and their slave women, for then they are not blameworthy; but whoever seeks beyond that, it is they who are the transgressors,***

The exposition of these three verses is to be found under the opening verses of Sūrah al-Muʾminūn [23:5-7].[2]

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمَانَاتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ رَاعُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

(70:32) ***And those who keep their trusts and covenants,***

Concerning "trusts," what primarily springs to the mind is any kind of property that people entrust to one another, as well as things that they require others to look after, such as dependents and reputation. "Keeping the trust" is to protect it and not to breach. According to some exegetes, "trusts" (*amānāt*) is mentioned in the plural because of the variety of its

1 See verses 3:9, 3:194, 13:31, 30:6, 39:20. (Trans.)

2 See volume 29, pp. 8-9 of the English translation. (Trans.)

types, as opposed to "covenant" (*ʿahd*).

Some exegetes have said that "trusts" include all beliefs and actions that God has made incumbent upon them. That would include both the rights of God and the rights of people; any violation of any of them would be a breach of trust.

Others have said that "trusts" includes any blessing that God has given to His servants, such as their bodily organs [for they are all given as a trust for a short span of time]. This means that if one uses any of God's bounties in a way other than intended by God, the person has breached the divine trust.

"Covenant" (*ʿahd*) apparently means any contract that one makes with another person, either verbally or practically.[1] Its observation is to abide by it, persevere it, and refrain from violating it. According to some exegetes, covenant includes any commitment that one makes toward another. This includes faith in one's Lord, because it entails the commitment to obey Him in all His commands. Hence, if one disobeys God in any of His injunctions, they have violated their covenant [with God].

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِشَهَادَاتِهِمْ قَائِمُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

(70:33) ***And those who stand by their testimonies*** **(bi-shahādātihim),**

The meaning of *shahādah* is well-known (testimony, witness). Standing by one's testimony means not refraining to offer the testimony [when called to], and also testifying without any concealment or distortion [of the facts]. This subject is treated in many verses in the Qur'an.[2]

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَىٰ صَلَاتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

(70:34) ***And those who are watchful on their prayer.***

Watching over the prayer means maintaining the qualities of perfection in prayer, as outlined and recommended in the shariah. Some exegetes have pointed out that "being watchful on the prayer" is different from "being constant with the prayer" [70:23]. The latter pertains to the prayer itself, while the former is about the manner and quality of the prayer.

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1 In other words, covenant is not limited to formal pledges and vows that one takes upon oneself through a verbal or legal attestation, but also includes ordinary commitments in the course of life. (Trans.)

2 See verses 2:140, 2:282-283, 4:135, 5:8, 5:106-108, 65:2. (Trans.)

Therefore, the verse is not repetitive.

أُولَٰئِكَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ مُكْرَمُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(70:35) *They will be in gardens, held in honor.*

The demonstrative pronoun "they" (*ūlāʾika*) refers to *those who pray* (70:22). The word "gardens" (*jannātin*) is in the indefinite form, which implies aggrandizement.[1] There are two ways of interpreting the verse: (1) "They will be in gardens, and they will be held in honor," which entails that the there are two predicates for "they," superimposed. (2) "They will be held in honor in gardens," which means that "in gardens" is the container (*ẓarf*) for "held in honor."

Examining Narrations

(1) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *fretful when evil befalls him* (70:20): Evil refers to poverty and lack. *And grudging when good comes his way* (70:21): Good signifies wealth and affluence.

(2) Imam al-Bāqir said: Then He excluded a group: *except those who pray* (70:22), and described them by their best deeds. *Those who are constant with their prayer* (70:23): That is, when they take on themselves to perform any optional worship, they persist with it.[2]

Author's comment: The Imam has inferred the idea of making something obligatory upon themselves from the ascription of prayer to them [in *their prayer*], as we explained above.

(3) Al-Fuḍayl b. Yasār says: Once I asked Imam al-Bāqir about the verse: *and those who are watchful on their prayers* (70:34). The Imam replied, "This refers to obligatory prayers." I asked about the verse: *those who are constant with their prayer* (70:23). He replied, "This refers to supererogatory prayers."[3]

(4) Concerning *and in whose wealth there is a known right* (70:24) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: The *known right* is not the obligatory *zakāt* (poor-rate, religious tax), but it is something that you set aside from your property: if you want every Friday or every day. Every

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1 That is: "They will be in such gardens." (Trans.)

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

virtuous person has his [level of] virtue.[1]

(5) In another narration the Imam interpreted the verse [70:24] as follows: It is to connect with your relatives [with your wealth],[2] give to one who has deprived you, and be charitable to one who has been hostile to you.[3]

(6) Concerning *for the beggar and the deprived* (al-maḥrūm) (70:25) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: *Maḥrūm* means *muḥāraf*:[4] one who is deprived of making a living through buying and selling."[5]

(7) Another interpretation narrated from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq is: *Maḥrūm* is one who has no mental deficiency, but does not have a sufficient livelihood, which means that they are *muḥāraf*.[6]

(8) Concerning *and those who are watchful on their prayers* (70:34) Imam al-Kāẓim said: They are those of our followers (*shīᶜah*) who observe the fifty units of prayer [daily].[7]

Author's comment: This statement may relate to the idea, found in some narrations from the Imams, that the supererogatory daily prayers were legislated to complement the obligatory ones.

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1 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*.

2 Given the next two phrases and many other similar narrations, it is likely that the first part should be: "It is to connect with one who has disconnected from you." (Trans.)

3 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*. The same idea is narrated through different chains of transmission from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq in *al-Kāfī*, and from Imam al-Bāqir in *al-Maḥāsin*.

4 *Muḥāraf* is an unsuccessful merchant; an unfortunate trader; one who has had no success in business. It can be interpreted as the opposite of *mubārak* (one who has been given blessing and abundance in their occupation). (Trans.)

5 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ṣafwān al-Jammāl.

6 *Al-Kāfī*.

7 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, on the authority of Muḥammad b. al-Fuḍayl.

Verses 36-44

فَمَالِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا قِبَلَكَ مُهْطِعِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾ عَنِ الْيَمِينِ وَعَنِ الشِّمَالِ عِزِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾
أَيَطْمَعُ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ مِنْهُمْ أَنْ يُدْخَلَ جَنَّةَ نَعِيمٍ ﴿٣٨﴾ كَلَّا ۖ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُمْ مِمَّا يَعْلَمُونَ
﴿٣٩﴾ فَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِرَبِّ الْمَشَارِقِ وَالْمَغَارِبِ إِنَّا لَقَادِرُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾ عَلَىٰ أَنْ نُبَدِّلَ خَيْرًا مِنْهُمْ
وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمَسْبُوقِينَ ﴿٤١﴾ فَذَرْهُمْ يَخُوضُوا وَيَلْعَبُوا حَتَّىٰ يُلَاقُوا يَوْمَهُمُ الَّذِي
يُوعَدُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾ يَوْمَ يَخْرُجُونَ مِنَ الْأَجْدَاثِ سِرَاعًا كَأَنَّهُمْ إِلَىٰ نُصُبٍ يُوفِضُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾
خَاشِعَةً أَبْصَارُهُمْ تَرْهَقُهُمْ ذِلَّةٌ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ الْيَوْمُ الَّذِي كَانُوا يُوعَدُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

(70:36) *Now what is the matter with those who disbelieve that keep staring at you,*
(70:37) *[scrambling] from the right and the left in batches?*
(70:38) *Does each man among them hope to be admitted to the garden of bliss?*
(70:39) *Never! Indeed We have created them from what they know.*
(70:40) *So I swear by the Lord of the easts and the wests that indeed We are able*
(70:41) *to replace [them] by [others] better than them and We shall not be outmaneuvered.*
(70:42) *So leave them to plunge [in vain] and play until they encounter their day, which they are promised:*
(70:43) *the day when they emerge from the graves, hastening, as if racing toward a target,*
(70:44) *with humbled eyes, overcast by abasement. That is the day they had been promised.*

Introduction & Commentary

The first set of verses in this chapter talked about the hastening of punishment, and stated that its occurrence is inevitable, without any way of averting it [70:1-2]. That punishment is the blazing fire of hell which destroys the limbs [70:15-16], and which pulls those who *turned back [from*

the truth] and forsook [it], and amassed [wealth] and hoarded [it] (70:17-18).

The second set of verses identified the cause of their damnation as the intrinsic instinct of covetousness and self-interest in humankind, which can lead them to follow their desires to the point of violating the rights of others arrogantly. That is what lands them in the everlasting fire [70:19-21]. It is only those who perform righteous deeds, affirm the Day of Retribution, and are apprehensive of divine punishment who will be delivered from that [quality of unbridled covetousness; 70:22-35].

Here, in the third and last set of verses, God refers to the disbelievers as if He is surprised by their behavior of constantly gathering around the Prophet, turning to him from every side, and fixing their eyes on him. He addresses the Prophet: "What is wrong with these people!? Why do they surround you, keep staring at you, and never let you go? Do they expect to enter the blissful gardens of paradise even though they are disbelievers? But God has ordained that only the believers—whom He excluded in the previous verses—may enter paradise. Do they wish to outstrip and defeat God by contravening His rule and ordainment [70:36-39]? Never! God, Who has created them from a drop of semen, is capable of taking them away and replacing them with a better community. He can create another people—from the same material—who will worship Him and will enter His paradise" [70:39-41]. Then God orders the Prophet to stop debating with them, and to *leave them to plunge [in vain] and play until they encounter their day, which they are promised* (70:42).

فَمَالِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا قِبَلَكَ مُهْطِعِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾ عَنِ الْيَمِينِ وَعَنِ الشِّمَالِ عِزِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(70:36-37) *Now what* (fa-mā) *is the matter with those who disbelieve that keep staring* (muhṭiʿīn) *at you* (qibalaka), *[scrambling] from the right and the left in batches* (ʿizīn)*?

Qibal means "the direction toward which something is facing." The letter *fāʾ* (lit. so, then, therefore) at the beginning of the verse is called *fāʾ al-faṣīḥah* (indicative, revelatory, clarifying).[1] *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says:

1 *Fāʾ al-faṣīḥah* indicates an omission of a clause or sentence which can be inferred from the context. It often implies: "Given what was said above…" More precisely, *fāʾ al-faṣīḥah* indicates a conditional sentence, where the introductory clause (protasis) is omitted, and only the complement (apodosis) is stated. The omitted protasis can be inferred from the previous discussion,

According to al-Zajjāj, *muhṭiʿ* is one who sets their gaze at something or someone like an enemy. According to Abū ʿUbaydah, *ihṭāʿ* is synonymous with *isrāʿ* (to rush, to hasten). *ʿIzīn* means sporadic and disjointed groups. It is the plural of *ʿizah*.

The meaning is: "Given what was said above—that humans are destined to hell as a result of disbelief and defiance of the truth, except for the believers that were excluded—now what is with the disbelievers who assemble around you with their eyes fixed on you, in scattered clusters from right and left? Do they aspire to enter paradise? Do they think they can escape from God's ordainment that only the righteous believers shall enter paradise?"

أَيَطْمَعُ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ مِنْهُمْ أَنْ يُدْخَلَ جَنَّةَ نَعِيمٍ ﴿٣٨﴾

(70:38) ***Does each man among them hope to be admitted to the garden of bliss?***

This is a rhetorical question which implies a negation. The meaning is: "What makes them surround you? Does each of them hope to enter paradise despite their disbelief? Never! Because there is no chance that the disbelievers may enter paradise."

With regards to their staring, the verse talks about them collectively, where the word *muhṭiʿīn* is in the plural form [70:36]. However, here it does not say, "Do *they* hope to enter," but it talks about them individually: *Does each man among them hope…?* This is because achieving happiness and salvation depends on aspiration at the individual level. It is only such hope which can lead one to believe and do righteous deeds. The presence of an overall sense of desire in a group is not sufficient for the salvation of every member of that group.

… to be admitted (yudkhala)…: The verb here is in the passive voice, and based on the verbal pattern *ifʿāl* [which makes a verb transitive]. This implies that their entrance into paradise is not a matter of their own choice

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while the resulting concision enhances the eloquences of the speech. The implied meaning is: "Now, if it is the case that those who pray will be held in honor, then what is the matter with those who disbelieve?"

In his introduction to the chapter, the author identified the *fāʾ* in this verse as *fāʾ al-tafrīʿ*, which can be translated as "therefore, thus, so, then." *Fāʾ al-faṣīḥah* is a specific type of *fāʾ al-tafrīʿ*. (Trans.)

and will. If they are ever to enter paradise, it will be only by God's admission and authorization. However, they will never make it there because of God's decree that no disbeliever shall enter paradise.

Some exegetes have said: When the Prophet prayed and recited the Qur'an beside the Kaʿbah, the polytheists would gather around him in circles and batches, would listen to his recitation, and then would mock him: "If these [despicable] believers are going to enter paradise, as Muḥammad says, then we will definite make it there before them!" That was the occasion for the revelation of these verses. They would gather around the Prophet and stare at him out of utmost hostility, and in order to abuse and harass him. The polytheists neither believed in the hereafter, nor acknowledged the truth of paradise and hell. Therefore, their statement that "we will definite make it there before them" can only be out of contempt and derision.

Comment: This idea is incommensurate with the theme and tone of the verses. The previous verses were about the deprivation of people from entering paradise, with the exception of the believers. The verses talked about hell and paradise, and then asked, with a rhetorical tone of surprise: "What makes these people wish to enter paradise?" Such behavior is not characteristic of a group who had no belief in the hereafter and no regard for paradise.

This further confirms that *those who disbelieve* (70:36) were a group of hypocrites [in Medina] who had believed in the Prophet outwardly, and were apparently committed to his message, but then "disbelieved" due to rejecting some of the commands that were revealed to the Prophet. Their disbelief is reflected in these verses: *That is because they believed and then disbelieved, so their hearts were sealed* (63:3); *Do not make excuses. You have disbelieved after your belief* (9:66); *So He caused hypocrisy to ensue in their hearts* (9:77). Accordingly, the verse in question concerns those who had converted to Islam, and had joined the community of the believers. They used to turn their eyes toward the Prophet from every direction in small clusters; yet they disbelieved by rejecting and ignoring some of God's revealions to His Prophet. So here God censures them by saying that they will not benefit from being in the company of the Prophet, and should have no hopes of entering paradise. They are not among those who will be admitted there, nor can they outstrip God of His decree and contravene His will. This idea is confirmed subsequently, as we shall discuss below:

We are able to replace [them] by [others] better than them (70:40-41).

كَلَّآ ۖ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُمْ مِمَّا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

(70:39) ***Never! Indeed We have created them from what*** **(min-mā)** ***they know.***

The word "never" rejects their hope of entering paradise as long as they are disbelivers. *What they know* means semen, from which humans are created. This is an explanation for "never," which is further elaborated in the following verses. The effective meaning is: "Indeed We have created them from semen, as they are well aware of it. Therefore, it is completely within Our power to take them away, and create another people instead of them—a better people, who would believe and not reject any part of God's religion. These disbelievers cannot override Our power and enter paradise despite Our decree that no disbeliever shall enter therein, for indeed We are never subdued by anyone."

Here are three views suggested by some exegetes:

(1) The particle *min* (from) in this verse is equivalent to the letter *lām* (for, because), which signifies justification (*taʿlīl*). The implied meaning is: "We have created them for the sake of what they know: to seek perfection through belief and obedience. Therefore, they must embrace faith and obey so that We may admit them to paradise. But how do they expect to be admitted there while they are disbelievers?" They would know this purpose [of their creation] through the Prophet's teaching.

(2) The particle *min* (from) signifies the origin of a movement. The implied meaning is: "We began their creation from a drop of impure semen which is incommensurate with the world of sanctity and transcendence. That initial defilement must be purified through belief, obedience and the angelic qualities, so that they may be admitted to the world of transcendence. Now, what chance do these people have while they remain disbelievers?"

(3) The particle *mā* (what, that) indicates the genus (*jins*) of what is created. The implied meaning is: "We have created them as humans, which is a of a genus or species that can have knowledge and cognition. We did no create them of the genus of animals that have no intelligence or understanding. Accordingly, Our argument is complete against them [for their unwarranted disbelief]."

Comment: All these three interpretations are implausible [given the apparent text and context of the verses].

فَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِرَبِّ الْمَشَارِقِ وَالْمَغَارِبِ إِنَّا لَقَادِرُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾ عَلَىٰ أَنْ نُبَدِّلَ خَيْرًا مِنْهُمْ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمَسْبُوقِينَ ﴿٤١﴾

(70:40-41) ***So I swear by the Lord of the easts and wests that indeed We are able to replace [them] by [others] better than them and We shall not be outmaneuvered.***

The easts and wests refer to the rising and setting places of the sun, which are as numerous as the days in a solar year. Every day the sun rises from a unique point and sets in a unique spot, and these exact positions are not ever repeated until the same day in the next year. It could also be that *the easts and wests* refer to the rising and setting places of all stars in general.

Despite its brevity, this verse includes three personal transitions: (1) While the last verse was in the first person plural (*We have created them*), this verse begins with a shift to the first person singular: *So I swear*. This transition stresses the vow by attributing it to God Himself. (2) Then the verse shifts to the third person [singular]: *by the Lord of the easts and wests*. Here God is referring to one of His attributes [as opposed to His essence], which is being the source of the creation of humankind, generation after generation, down the centuries. An integral element here is time, which is inseparable from the persistent creation of humans throughout the ages, and all terrestrial events occurring in the world of nature. This element is represented by referring to the constant recurrence of one sunrise after another, and one sunset after another. (3) Then the verse reverts to the first person plural: *that indeed We are able*. This is a majestic plural, also called the royal "we." It signifies a sense of grandeur that is implied by the divine omnipotence.

Further, describing God as *the Lord of the easts and wests* proves the subsequent claim *that indeed We are able*. His universal Lordship means that He is the director of all events in the world. Every event is an act of God. Given this, none of His own acts can limit Him from performing another act. Nothing in His creation can prevent Him from substituting one part with a better one. Otherwise, that force would be a partner with God in His management of His creation. But He is the only God, with no partner in His Lordship. The reader should reflect on this.

… We are able to* (ʿalá) *replace* (nubaddila) *[them] by [others] better than them…: The preposition *ʿalá* (over, on, above) introduces the object of God's power in *We are able*. The verb *nubaddila* is ditransitive, but only

its second object is mentioned in the verse. Its first object is the pronoun "them" [referring to *those who disbelieve* (70:36)]. Its omission indicates their unworthiness and lack of importance to God. The second object is "better," which is an adjective for an omitted noun [which is *qawm* (people, group, community)]. The implied meaning is: "We are able to replace them (*nubaddilahum*) by a better people than them." They are a better people in that they would believe in God instead of denying Him, and would follow the truth instead of rejecting it.

… and We shall not be outmaneuvered **(masbūqīn, from sabaq)*:*** The verb *sabaqa* literally means "to outrun someone." It is used metaphorically for defeating and subduing someone. Being *masbūq* (outmaneuvered, outstripped, overcome) would mean that the people could impede God from taking them away and bringing a better people instead of them.

The comparative adjective "better" (*khayr*) in this verse suggests that there is *some* good in these people, even though God may substitute them with a better community. This could be evidence for what we said above: that *those who disbelieve* (70:36) are the hypocrites, not the polytheists who categorically rejected the religion and denied the hereafter. The hypocrites at least paid lip service to the Islamic faith, refrained from repudiating it openly, and maintained the outward aspects of religion. So they had some level of good, as opposed to the polytheists who lacked all religious virtue.

To summarize, what follows from *Indeed We have created them from what they know* (70:39) up to three verses [*We shall not be outmaneuvered* (70:41)] justifies the rejection implied by the word "never" (*kallā*, at the beginning of verse 70:39). God's argument in these verses is: "As they know very well, they have been created from an insignificant drop of semen. This is an ongoing process of creation, and God is the Lord and Director of all temporal events, including the creation of humankind generation after generation. Thus He is able to destroy them and substitute them by others who are worthy enough to enter paradise due to their care about religion. God's creation of these disbelievers does not impede Him from creating better people and admitting them to paradise based on their faith. He is not compelled to admit these disbelievers into paradise. Hence, the divine ordainment—that paradise is reserved only for believers with good deeds—will never fail."

فَذَرْهُمْ يَخُوضُوا وَيَلْعَبُوا حَتَّىٰ يُلَاقُوا يَوْمَهُمُ الَّذِي يُوعَدُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

(70:42) ***So leave them to plunge [in vain]*** **(yakhūḍū, from khawḍ)**

and play **(yalʿabū, from laʿib)** ***until they encounter their day, which they are promised:***

Here God commands the Prophet to leave the audience alone in their actions, not to insist on arguing with them, and not to tire himself in trying to admonish them. Their activities are described as *khawḍ* (immersion in vanity, futile speech) and *laʿib* (play, sport, amusement), indicating that they shall not reap any real benefit from what they do, despite all the effort and energy that they put into it. Their acts are like childish games which have no impact beyond amusing the imagination. So leave them on their own until they face their promised day, which is the Day of Resurrection. *Their day* indicates a special connection between the "day" and "them." In this case, what makes it *their* day is that they are the ones who will be punished on that day.

يَوْمَ يَخْرُجُونَ مِنَ الْأَجْدَاثِ سِرَاعًا كَأَنَّهُمْ إِلَىٰ نُصُبٍ يُوفِضُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

(70:43) ***The day when they emerge from the graves*** **(al-ajdāth),** ***hastening*** **(sirāʿan),** ***as if racing*** **(yūfiḍūna, from īfāḍ)** ***toward a target*** **(nuṣub),**

This verse interprets and describes *their day, which they are promised* (70:42), which is the Day of Resurrection. *Ajdāth* is the plural form of *jadath* (grave, tomb). *Sirāʿ* is the plural of *sarīʿ* (fast, quick, swift). *Īfāḍ* is synonymous with *isrāʿ* (hastening, rushing, speeding). *Nuṣub* means a signpost which is set up (*yunṣabu*) in the ways to guide the travelers. Some exegetes have interpreted it as "idol," which were set up (*manṣūb*) for worship. However, this is an unlikely interpretation given the Qur'an's language.[1]

خَاشِعَةً أَبْصَارُهُمْ تَرْهَقُهُمْ ذِلَّةٌ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ الْيَوْمُ الَّذِي كَانُوا يُوعَدُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

(70:44) ***With humbled*** **(khāshiʿah, from khushūʿ)** ***eyes, overcast*** **(tarhaquhum, from rahq)** ***by abasement. That*** **(dhālika)** ***is the day they had been promised***

Khushūʿ means "the resulting feeling and impression in the heart when

1 This sentence can be interpreted in two ways: (1) The other Qur'anic usages of *nuṣub* (and other derivatives from the same root) do not support this meaning. (2) It is unlikely of God's speech to use the imagery of the idolaters' attraction to their idols in order to describe people's hastening on the Day of Resurrection. (Trans.)

confronting something magnificent and grandiose." This inner quality is comparable with *khuḍūʿ* (humbleness, tranquility), which appears outwardly in bodily organs. Here the eyes are described as *khāshiʿah*, in the sense that they exhibit the humility of the heart. *Rahq* means "covering something with force."

The demonstrative pronoun "that" (*dhālika*) refers to all the previous descriptions of that day: emerging from the graves in a rush, having humbled looks in their eyes, and being covered with humiliation.

Examining Narrations

(1) Once the Messenger of God entered the Mosque [in Medina] and said [to his Companions]: Why do I see you *ʿizīn*—sitting in small circles as in the pre-Islamic era, where one's back is to his brother?[1]

(2) Once the Messenger of God came by his Companions, where they were sitting in small circles. He said: Why do I see you *ʿizīn*?[2]

(3) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *Never! Indeed We have created them from what they know* (70:39): That is, from *nuṭfah* (semen, sperm), and then *ʿalaqah* (blood-clot). *So I swear by the Lord of the easts* (al-mashāriq) *and the wests* (al-maghārib) (70:40): *Mashāriq* and *maghārib* denote the rising and setting points of the sun in the winter and the summer.

(4) Imam ʿAlī said: The sun has 360 places of rising (sing. *mashriq*) and 360 places of setting (sing. *maghrib*). Once it rises on any day, it does not return to it until the same day next year.[3]

(5) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *the day when they emerge from* al-ajdāth, *hastening* (70:43): That is, from the graves. *As if racing toward a target* (70:43): They are called toward a caller. *Overcast* (tarhaquhum) *by abasement* (70:44): It means they are struck and afflicted by humiliation (*tuṣībuhum*).

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, on the authority of ʿUbādat b. Anas.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah. The same idea is also narrated from Jābir b. Samurah.

3 *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAbd-Allāh b. Abī Ḥammād, via an unconnected chain of transmission (*marfūʿ*).

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Chapter 71

Nūḥ (Noah)

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Verses 1-24

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ أَنْ أَنْذِرْ قَوْمَكَ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١﴾ قَالَ
يَا قَوْمِ إِنِّي لَكُمْ نَذِيرٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿٢﴾ أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاتَّقُوهُ وَأَطِيعُونِ ﴿٣﴾ يَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ
مِنْ ذُنُوبِكُمْ وَيُؤَخِّرْكُمْ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُسَمًّى ۚ إِنَّ أَجَلَ اللَّهِ إِذَا جَاءَ لَا يُؤَخَّرُ ۖ لَوْ
كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤﴾ قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي دَعَوْتُ قَوْمِي لَيْلًا وَنَهَارًا ﴿٥﴾ فَلَمْ يَزِدْهُمْ دُعَائِي
إِلَّا فِرَارًا ﴿٦﴾ وَإِنِّي كُلَّمَا دَعَوْتُهُمْ لِتَغْفِرَ لَهُمْ جَعَلُوا أَصَابِعَهُمْ فِي آذَانِهِمْ وَاسْتَغْشَوْا
ثِيَابَهُمْ وَأَصَرُّوا وَاسْتَكْبَرُوا اسْتِكْبَارًا ﴿٧﴾ ثُمَّ إِنِّي دَعَوْتُهُمْ جِهَارًا ﴿٨﴾ ثُمَّ إِنِّي
أَعْلَنْتُ لَهُمْ وَأَسْرَرْتُ لَهُمْ إِسْرَارًا ﴿٩﴾ فَقُلْتُ اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ غَفَّارًا ﴿١٠﴾
يُرْسِلِ السَّمَاءَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِدْرَارًا ﴿١١﴾ وَيُمْدِدْكُمْ بِأَمْوَالٍ وَبَنِينَ وَيَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ
جَنَّاتٍ وَيَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ أَنْهَارًا ﴿١٢﴾ مَا لَكُمْ لَا تَرْجُونَ لِلَّهِ وَقَارًا ﴿١٣﴾ وَقَدْ خَلَقَكُمْ
أَطْوَارًا ﴿١٤﴾ أَلَمْ تَرَوْا كَيْفَ خَلَقَ اللَّهُ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا ﴿١٥﴾ وَجَعَلَ الْقَمَرَ فِيهِنَّ
نُورًا وَجَعَلَ الشَّمْسَ سِرَاجًا ﴿١٦﴾ وَاللَّهُ أَنْبَتَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ نَبَاتًا ﴿١٧﴾ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُكُمْ
فِيهَا وَيُخْرِجُكُمْ إِخْرَاجًا ﴿١٨﴾ وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ بِسَاطًا ﴿١٩﴾ لِتَسْلُكُوا
مِنْهَا سُبُلًا فِجَاجًا ﴿٢٠﴾ قَالَ نُوحٌ رَبِّ إِنَّهُمْ عَصَوْنِي وَاتَّبَعُوا مَنْ لَمْ يَزِدْهُ مَالُهُ
وَوَلَدُهُ إِلَّا خَسَارًا ﴿٢١﴾ وَمَكَرُوا مَكْرًا كُبَّارًا ﴿٢٢﴾ وَقَالُوا لَا تَذَرُنَّ آلِهَتَكُمْ وَلَا
تَذَرُنَّ وَدًّا وَلَا سُوَاعًا وَلَا يَغُوثَ وَيَعُوقَ وَنَسْرًا ﴿٢٣﴾ وَقَدْ أَضَلُّوا كَثِيرًا ۖ وَلَا تَزِدِ
الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا ضَلَالًا ﴿٢٤﴾

Chapter 71, Verses 1-24

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

(71:1) *Indeed We sent Noah to his people, [saying,] that "Warn your people before a painful punishment overtakes them."*

(71:2) *He said, "O my people! Indeed I am a manifest warner to you.*

(71:3) *Worship Allah and be wary of Him, and obey me,*

(71:4) *that He may forgive you [some] of your sins and respite you until a specified end. Indeed when Allah's end comes, it cannot be deferred, if you but knew."*

(71:5) *He said, "My Lord! Indeed I have called my people night and day*

(71:6) *but my calling has only increased their evasion.*

(71:7) *Indeed whenever I called them, so that You may forgive them, they put their fingers in their ears and drew their cloaks over themselves, and persisted, and waxed very proud.*

(71:8) *Again I called them aloud,*

(71:9) *and again appealed to them publicly and confided with them privately,*

(71:10) *telling [them], 'Plead to your Lord for forgiveness, for indeed He is All-Forgiver.*

(71:11) *He will let loose the sky upon you showering,*

(71:12) *and will aid you with wealth and children, and will provide you with gardens, and will provide you with streams.*

(71:13) *What is the matter with you that you do not speculate any weight for Allah,*

(71:14) *though He has created you in [various] stages?*

(71:15) *Have you not seen how Allah has created seven heavens in layers,*

(71:16) *and has made therein the moon for a light, and the sun for a lamp?*

(71:17) *Allah has made you grow from the earth [as] plants.*

(71:18) *Then He makes you return to it, and He will bring you forth again [a new] forth-bringing.*

(71:19) *Allah has made the earth a carpet for you*

(71:20) *so that you may travel over its spacious ways."*

(71:21) *Noah said, "My Lord! They have disobeyed me, and have followed someone whose wealth and children only add to his loss,*

(71:22) *and they have plotted a mighty plot.*

(71:23) *They have said, 'Do not abandon your gods. Do not abandon Wadd, nor Suwāᶜ, nor Yaghūth, Yaᶜūq and Nasr,'*

(71:24) *and already they have led many astray. Do not increase the wrongdoers in anything but error."*

Introduction & Commentary

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 28 verses. The sūrah discusses a concise account of Prophet Noah's mission to his people, their dismissal of his call, his complaint to the Lord, his curse against them, his appeal to God to forgive him along with his parents and any believing man or woman who entered his home, and finally the drowning of his people through divine punishment. The context of the verse reflects that it was revealed in Mecca.

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ أَنْ أَنْذِرْ قَوْمَكَ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١﴾

(71:1) ***Indeed We sent Noah to his people, [saying] that "Warn*** **(andhir, from indhār)** ***your people before a painful punishment overtakes them."***

The verse shows that Noah's people were on the verge of being overtaken by punishment for their polytheism and sins, as it is further reflected below, where he introduces himself as a warner, and commands them to *Worship Allah and be wary of Him* (70:3). *Indhār* (warning) is synonymous with *takhwīf* (threatening, scaring), and that is done when someone is facing a potential risk or danger, which will occur unless they take heed and avoid it.

… that **(an)** ***"Warn your people…":*** The word "that" (the Arabic particle *an*) interprets and elaborates the mission for which *We sent Noah*. It implies: "We revealed to him that 'Warn your people…'"

… before a painful punishment overtakes them: This phrase shows that if they do not act up to save themselves, the punishment will inevitably befall them.

قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ إِنِّي لَكُمْ نَذِيرٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿٢﴾ أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاتَّقُوهُ وَأَطِيعُونِ ﴿٣﴾

(71:2-3) ***He said, "O my people! Indeed I am a manifest warner to you. Worship Allah and be wary of Him, and obey me.***

He first briefly introduced his mission by saying: *Indeed I am a manifest warner to you*. Then he elaborated his message in the next verse: *Worship Allah*… Noah ascribed his people to himself by saying *my people*. By so doing he showed his compassion and goodwill toward them. It means: "You are all my people; we are united under the umbrella of

belonging to the same community. Your misfortune is my misfortune. I wish for you only your good and happiness. That is why *Indeed I am a manifest warner to you…*"

Worship Allah…: Noah called his people to monotheism, since they were idolaters. There is no room in idolatry for the worship of God. Instead, the idolaters worship their idols as representatives and symbols of higher lords and gods, so that they may intercede for them before God. If they also worshiped God along with their idols, then his message was to worship Him alone.

***… and be wary of Him* (ittaqūhu, from taqwá):** Noah ordered them to refrain from all sins, both major and minor. That would mean avoiding polytheism and lesser sins. It would also entail performing obligatory righteous deeds—for their lack of observance would be a sin.

… and obey me: This would mean acknowledging him as God's messenger, and learning from him the necessary religious teachings by which they would worship God and conduct their lives. The ternary of his message can be matched with the three principles of religion: (1) *Worship Allah* corresponds to monotheism. (2) *And be wary of Him* pertains to belief in the hereafter, which is the basis for *taqwá* (Godwariness, self-restraint, piety).[1] (3) The command to unconditional obedience of him—*and obey me*—means acknowledging prophethood.

يَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ مِنْ ذُنُوبِكُمْ وَ يُؤَخِّرْكُمْ إِلى أَجَلٍ مُسَمًّى إِنَّ أَجَلَ اللَّهِ إِذا جاءَ لا يُؤَخَّرُ لَوْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤﴾

(71:4) *that He may forgive* (yaghfir) *you [some] of* (min) *your sins and respite you until a specified end. Indeed when Allah's end comes, it cannot be deferred, if you but knew."*

The meaning is: "If you worship God, be wary of Him, and obey me, He will forgive you some of your sins."[2] Those are sins that they commit-

1 In the absence of any reckoning and retribution in the hereafter, there would be no binding support for religious piety (*taqwá*). (Auth.)

2 The verb *yaghfir* (forgive) is *majzūm* (apocopated), which indicates that this is the consequence of his commands [in the last verse]. The particle *min* (of, from) is partitive, which is what springs to the mind first in this context. (Auth.)

ted before their conversion, including polytheism and any lesser sins. As with their future sins, forgiveness is not applicable because the sins are not committed yet. Nor does it make sense to promise them that any sin which they may commit in the future will be forgiven, because that would render religious obligations vain, since there is no retribution to be followed in that case. The are also other verses which confirm this idea [that belief in God and His religion will absolve one of one's past sins, as a part of one's lifetime sins]: *O our people! Respond to Allah's summoner and have faith in Him. He will forgive you [some] of your sins* (46:31); *He calls you to forgive you [some] of your sins* (14:10); *Say to the faithless, if they relinquish [faithlessness], what is already past shall be forgiven to them.* (8:38).

There is another verse which is addressed to believers in Islam: *O you who believe! Shall I show you a deal that will deliver you from a painful punishment? Believe in Allah and His Messenger, and wage jihad in the way of Allah with your possessions and your persons. That is better for you, if only you knew. He shall forgive you your sins and admit you into gardens* (61:10-12). These verses seem to suggest forgiveness of all sins. However, the verbs used for belief and action [*tuʾminūna* and *tujāhidūna*] are expressed in the present tense, which shows continuity of faith and good deeds as long as one lives. That is the basis for the promised forgiveness. Otherwise, the verse does not promise forgiveness to an uncommitted sin; nor does it promise forgiveness for future sins unconditionally.

Given the apparent general sense of forgiveness in Sūrah al-Ṣaff [61:12], some exegetes have argued:

> Conversion to Islam would absolve *all* of one's sins, while conversion to the previous religions only absolved them of *some* of their sins. This is reflected in the following verses: (1) Noah told his people: *He may forgive you [some] of your sins* (70:4). (2) The messengers are quoted as having said: *He calls you to forgive you [some] of your sins* (14:10). (3) The jinn said: *O our people! Respond to Allah's summoner and have faith in Him. He will forgive you [some] of your sins* (46:31).

There are two problems with this argument: (1) The verses in Sūrah al-Ṣaff [61:10-12] are not about belief alone, as we explained above. (2) The verse quoted above from Sūrah al-Anfāl [8:38] explicitly talks about the forgiveness of *what is already past* (8:38), and it is addressed to disbelievers in Islam.

Here are three other implausible interpretations suggested by some exegetes: (1) The particle *min* (of, from) in *min dhunūbikum* (of your sins) is *zāʾidah* (extra, redundant, semantically empty).[1] The problem with this view is that the extra *min* is not used in affirmative statements. (2) The particle *min* is *bayāniyyah* (explanatory, interpretive, descriptive).[2] (3) The particle *min* signifies the origin of a movement (called *ibtidāʾ al-ghāyah*).[3]

… and respite you until a specified end…: They will be given respite until a specific time conditional on worshiping God, being wary of Him, and obeying His messenger [71:3]. This shows that there are two kinds of *ajal* (end, term, time): one is fixed and specified (*musammá*), and the other is not. If they responded positively to the religious call, their term would be postponed until their specified time. But if they insisted with disbelief, their term would finish sooner by the hastening of the other end toward them. The verse is saying that if they believe, God will postpone their death to their specified end, which is the longest possible duration assigned to each person.

… Indeed when Allah's end comes, it cannot be deferred…: This sentence justifies why they will be respited to a specified end if they believed. What is meant by the "coming of God's end" is what He decrees and enacts, whether that is a specified term or an unspecified one. Nothing can deflect God's decree; *there is none who may repeal His Judgment* [13:41]. The meaning is: "Worship God, be wary of Him, and obey me! Then God will postpone you to a specified end, which is the longest of your terms. If you do not do so, your unspecified end will come to you because of your disbelief. And you will not be respited, because there is no postponement of God's end once it comes." Therefore, the verse gives them the good promise of extension until the specified end if they believe, and also warns them of a quick punishment if they fail to believe.

Given our explanation, *God's end* [in the last part of the verse] is meant in its general sense and should not be restricted—as some exegetes have done—to either the specified end, or the unspecified end. Another exegete has suggested that *God's end* means the Day of Resurrection. Apparently, he has also assumed that the *specified end* should be interpreted as the Day

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1 The meaning would be: "He will forgive you your sins…" (Trans.)

2 The meaning would be: "He will forgive you—that is, your sins—…" (Trans.)

3 The meaning would be: "He will forgive you, starting with your sins…" (Trans.)

of Resurrection. Then the meaning would be: "If you do not believe, God will send your punishment in this world before long. But if you believe, he will give you respite until the Day of Resurrection, which is a day that shall never be postponed when its time comes." However, this interpretation is not concordant with the glad tidings implied by: *that He may forgive you [some] of your sins*.

… if you but knew": The object of knowledge is omitted as it is implied by the previous part of the verse. The meaning is: "If you knew that God has ordained two ends, and that once the end He has specified comes it cannot be deferred, then you would respond to my call, would worship God, would be wary of Him, and would obey me."

Some exegetes have suggested that this phrase refers to knowledge per se, as an intransitive quality. Then the complement of the conditional clause here can be either the first or the second part of the verse. The two suggested meanings are: (1) "If you were among the people of knowledge, you would respond to my call and believe in my message." (2) "If you were among the people of knowledge, you would know that God has ordained two ends, and that once the end He has specified comes, it will not be postponed."

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي دَعَوْتُ قَوْمِي لَيْلًا وَنَهَارًا ۝٥

(71:5) ***He said, "My Lord! Indeed I have called my people night and day,***

The speaker here is Noah. His calling was to worship God, be wary of Him, and obey His messenger. Calling them "night and day" figuratively means his consistent propagation of the message, without weariness or failing.

فَلَمْ يَزِدْهُمْ دُعَائِي إِلَّا فِرَارًا ۝٦

(71:6) ***but my calling has only increased their evasion*** **(firāran).**

What is meant here is their refusal to respond to his call. Their refusal and dismissal is metaphorically called *firār* (escape, flight, evasion).[1] The verse suggests that *my calling* was somewhat a "cause" of *their evasion*. This is true, because when a good thing is placed in an unsuitable setting,

1 In other words, the verse does not mean that they literally ran away from him as one would run away from a vicious beast. Rather, the expression shows their utmost negligence and disparagement of Noah and his message. (Trans.)

that goodness will be met with the evil of that setting, and will thus turn into evil. The same theme is stated about the Qur'an: *We send down in the Qur'an that which is a cure and mercy for the faithful; and it increases the wrongdoers only in loss* (17:82).

وَ إِنِّي كُلَّما دَعَوْتُهُمْ لِتَغْفِرَ لَهُمْ جَعَلُوا أَصابِعَهُمْ فِي آذانِهِمْ وَ اسْتَغْشَوْا ثِيابَهُمْ وَ أَصَرُّوا وَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا اسْتِكْباراً ﴿٧﴾

(71:7) ***I called them, so that You may forgive them, they put their fingers in their ears and drew their cloaks over themselves, and persisted, and waxed very proud.***

Noah mentioned God's forgiveness as the objective of his call. That is the fruit the audience would receive by responding positively to him. He expressed his objective in this way to show that he was a sincere friend and a well-wisher for them; that he only wanted the good of both worlds for them. His expression involves an omission, where the implied meaning is: "Whenever I called them *to believe* so that You may forgive them…"

… They would put their fingers in their ears…: This is a metaphorical way of describing their refusal to listen to his message

… and drew their cloaks over themselves…: That is, they covered their heads and faces in their cloaks so that they do not even see me nor hear my voice. This is a figurative depiction of their aversion and unwillingness to listen to his message.

… and persisted, and waxed very proud: They insistently refrained from listening to me, and arrogantly refused to accept my call—with such outrageous pride.

ثُمَّ إِنِّي دَعَوْتُهُمْ جِهاراً ﴿٨﴾

(71:8) ***Again* (thumma) *I called them aloud (jihāran),***

The word *thumma* here does not denote temporal sequence of events, but only the next part of the report and expression.[1] *Jihār* means "calling with the highest pitch."

ثُمَّ إِنِّي أَعْلَنْتُ لَهُمْ وَ أَسْرَرْتُ لَهُمْ إِسْراراً ﴿٩﴾

1 The word *thumma* in this verse can be translated as "in addition" or "besides." (Trans.)

(71:9) ***and again appealed to them publicly*** **(aʿlantu, from iʿlān)** ***and confided with them privately*** **(asrartu lahum isrāran, from isrār),**

Iʿlān and *isrār* are opposites, meaning "public proclamation" and "private conversation," respectively. Apparently the two pronouns "them" refer to the same noun [his people]. The meaning is: "I called them both publicly and privately, sometimes in this way and sometimes in that. I pursued every possible way and tried every prospect."

فَقُلْتُ اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ كانَ غَفَّاراً ﴿١٠﴾

(71:10) ***Plead to your Lord for forgiveness, for indeed He is All-Forgiver*** **(ghaffāran).**

The second sentence—*for indeed He is All-Forgiver*—justifies Noah's command that they should ask for God's forgiveness. The intensive form of the attribute *Ghaffār* (All-Forgiver) signifies two aspects of God's forgiveness: (1) its great extent and abundance; (2) its continuity as an incessant divine custom.

يُرْسِلِ السَّماءَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِدْراراً ﴿١١﴾

(71:11) ***He will let loose the sky upon you showering*** **(midrāran),**

The word *samāʾ* (sky, heaven) implies "the clouds" in this context. *Midrār* means "pouring and showering abundant rain." The verb *yursil* is *majzūm* (apocopated), which indicates that this is the consequence of his commands [in the last verse].

وَ يُمْدِدْكُمْ بِأَمْوالٍ وَ بَنِينَ وَ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ جَنَّاتٍ وَ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ أَنْهاراً ﴿١٢﴾

(71:12) ***and will aid*** **(yumdidkum, from imdād)** ***you with wealth and children, and will provide you with gardens, and will provide you with streams.***

Imdād means "supplying one with *madad*," which is what helps the recipient to meet their needs. "Wealth and children" are the most primary means that are sought and used in human societies to fulfill their needs.

… and will provide you with gardens, and will provide you with streams: Gardens and streams are sub-categories of wealth, but they are mentioned separately because of their special significance in meeting the necessities of human life.

As one can see, these verses enumerate worldly blessings. Noah promised these blessings to his people if they invoke God to forgive them. This

shows that forgiveness of sins has a substantial impact on the removal of large-scale disasters, and on the opening of the doors of bounties from the heaven and the earth. In other words, while the world of nature has an impact on the ease and hardship of human life, those natural conditions are themselves tied to the betterment and deterioration of human societies [in terms of leading virtuous or vicious lives]. The same theme is to be found in the following verses: *Corruption has appeared in land and sea because of the doings of the people's hands* (30:41); *Whatever affliction befalls you is because of what your hands have earned* (42:30); *If the people of the towns had been faithful and God wary, We would have opened to them blessings from the heaven and the earth* (7:96). The readers are encouraged to consult our discussions under these verses.

ما لَكُمْ لا تَرْجُونَ لِلَّهِ وَقاراً ﴿١٣﴾

(71:13) ***What is the matter with you that you do not speculate*** **(tarjūna, from rajāʾ)** ***any weight*** **(waqāran)** ***for Allah,***

According to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, the word *waqār* is synonymous with *ʿaẓamah* (greatness, magnificence, grandeur). It is derived from *tawqīr*, which is synonymous with *taʿẓīm* (to venerate, to exalt, to honor). *Rajāʾ* (hope) is the opposite of *khawf* (fear); it means "anticipating something pleasant." Some exegetes have suggested that *rajāʾ* in this verse means "belief" in its general sense. Others have interpreted it as "fear" based on the mutual implication between the two. According to these suggestions, the meaning would be: "What makes you not believe in—or not fear—any greatness for God, which would impel you to worship Him?"

However, the correct view is that *rajāʾ* (hope) has its original meaning here, which is the opposite of fear. Lack of hope in this verse describes a state of despair. The word "hope" is used to describe one's speculation and expectation of some benefit. When one does not anticipate any good from someone or something, one says, "I have no hope of good in him"; "There is no hope in it"; "This is hopeless."[1]

1 Hope (*rajāʾ*) is conventionally used for a desirable event which is uncertain but possible. However, the Qur'an often uses it for any anticipation, speculation and prospect, such as looking forward to God (33:21, 60:6), expecting to encounter God (10:7, 10:11, 10:15, 18:110, 25:21, 29:5), anticipating any resurrection (25:40), speculating the Last Day (29:36, 33:21, 60:6), expecting any reckoning (78:27)

Also, the word *waqār* in this verse means *thubūt*, *istiqrār* and *tamakkūn* (stability, fixity, establishment), which is the original meaning of the root, as we quoted from *Majmaʿ al-bayān*. God's *waqār* means his establishment and firmness in His quality of Lordship, which necessitates Him to be worshiped as a deity. The verse suggests that the idolaters at the time of Noah wanted some lord who is established in his lordship, so that they may worship him, but they despaired of God filling this gap for them. Thus they resorted to worshiping others. The polytheists' line of argument was:

> Our minds cannot comprehend God, so He cannot be the object of our worship directly. He is beyond our access, and reaching a God so high is pie in the sky . Worship means paying one's due to one's lord, and the lord is one who is in charge of directing the affairs of the world, which has been entrusted to various groups from the angels and the jinn. Hence, *they* are our lords: we must worship them so that they may intercede for us before God. As with God Himself, He is only the originator. He has created both the lords and their servants, but He is not in charge of directing their affairs.

This verse—*What is the matter with you that you do not speculate any weight for Allah* (71:13)—and the next seven verses are centered around proving God's *waqār* (stability, significance, weightiness) as a Lord. They present a decisive proof against their contrived arguments for worshiping the angels and other beings based on the idea that the management of the world is in their hands. The verses clarify that one can indeed direct one's worship to the Almighty God.

The argument in thse verses can be summarized as follows: "What has made you deny the lordship of God, which makes Him worthy to be worshiped? Why have you lost hope in His majesty? You know that He has

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and anticipating God's days (45:14). What is meant in these verses is "belief," but the Qur'an uses "hope" because the object of belief is hidden from us and thus uncertain to us. This is exactly why it is a matter of *īmān* (faith, belief). Belief in the unseen is speculative by nature. That is why the Qur'an uses hope, which implies a sense of expectation and uncertainty, when talking about matters of faith in the unseen. The same can be said about the word *ẓann* (conjecture, reckoning, speculation). In many verses it is used for sure belief—which is its opposite—on the grounds that the object of that belief is speculative by nature. (Trans.)

created you—and this world where you dwell in—as a stage of creation which is inseparable from the order which governs the universe. What does it mean to direct the affairs of the entire universe, including humans which are part of it? *Directing* is in fact nothing but *creating* the constituent stages and elements of this order one after another. In other words, direction of affairs boils down to the creation of beings. Since God is the Creator of everything, it follows that He is also the Owner and Director of the world. This means that *He* alone is the Lord, and there is no lord beside Him. Therefore, He is the One Who must be worshiped."

The above argument also clarifies why we can worship God directly, because we know His excellent attributes of action such as the Creator, the Sustainer and the Merciful. Therefore, we can turn to Him through His attributes which are known to us [as opposed to His essence which we cannot comprehend].[1]

وَ قَدْ خَلَقَكُمْ أَطْواراً ﴿١٤﴾

(71:14) *Though He has created you in [various] stages* (aṭwāran)*?*

Aṭwār is the plural of *ṭawr*, which means "the degree, position and state of something." The meaning of the verse is: "Why do you not consider any weight for God's Lordship, while He has brought you to existence in consecutive stages? Every one of you is created through the stages of being dust, sperm, clot of blood (*ʿalaqah*), lump of flesh (*muḍghah*), fetus, infant, child, youth, middle-aged, and old. Also, as a whole species He has created you in a variety of forms: males and females of different colors, physical appearances, capabilities, and so on. Is this anything other than *tadbīr* (direction of affairs, management, regulation)? Therefore, He is the director of your affairs, which means that He is your Lord [Whom you should worship]."[2]

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1 There are two reasons for why we only mentioned God's attributes of actions (*ṣifāt al-fiʿl*) as our means of knowing Him: (1) The idolaters did not believe in any essential attributes for God. They interpreted God's essential attributes as reducing to privative qualities. For instance, saying that God is All-Living, Omnipotent or Omniscient, meant to them, that He is not dead, weak, or ignorant. (2) The verses in question discuss God's attributes of action. (Auth.)

2 This verse functions as a *ḥāl* (circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase), describing the condition of God in the last verse: *you do not speculate any weight for Allah* (70:13). (Auth.)

أَ لَمْ تَرَوْا كَيْفَ خَلَقَ اللَّهُ سَبْعَ سَماواتٍ طِباقاً ﴿١٥﴾

(71:15) ***Have you not seen how Allah has created seven heavens in layers* (ṭibāqan)*?***

As we discussed at the beginning of Sūrah al-Mulk [67:3], there are two possible interpretations for the word *ṭibāq* when used to describe the seven heavens: (1) These heavens lie one above the others (*muṭābaqah*). (2) There is similarity and likeness between them (*taṭābuq*). "Seeing" here means "knowing." Noah said this as a part of his argument against his people, which shows that they believed in the existence of seven heavens. He referred to something that was accepted among them to illustrate his point. We can infer from this reference by Noah that the belief in the seven heavens was among the teachings of the divine messengers prior to him.

وَ جَعَلَ الْقَمَرَ فِيهِنَّ نُوراً وَ جَعَلَ الشَّمْسَ سِراجاً ﴿١٦﴾

(71:16) ***And has made therein the moon for a light, and the sun for a lamp?***

The context of these verses is to pursue the following general line of argument: (a) You should worship God because He is your Lord. (b) He is your Lord because He directs all your affairs. (c) He directs all your affairs because of all these blessings which He bestows upon you. Accordingly, the current verse describes the Sun as a lamp, which refers to its role in illuminating our world. Without it, our world would have sunk into darkness. Similarly, it describes the moon as a light, meaning that it illuminates our earth with the light which it derives from the sun. The moon is not called a lamp because it is not luminous itself.

And has made therein* (fīhinna) *the moon for a light…: The preposition *fīhinna* (therein, in them) is in the plural form, referring to the seven heavens. They are mentioned as a place or container (*ẓarf*) for the moon. As some exegetes have clarified, what is meant is that the moon is in their space overall, even though it is really only in one of them. This is like when we say, "There is a well in these houses," even though the well is in one of them only. Similarly, it is common to say, "I visited Banū Tamīm," when one has visited a single person or household from that tribe.

وَ اللَّهُ أَنْبَتَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ نَباتاً ﴿١٧﴾

(71:17) ***Allah has made you grow from the earth [as] plants* (nabātan).**

The last part of the verse involves an implied omission. The meaning is: "He made you grow from the earth the growing of plants" (*inbāt al-nabāt*).[1] This refers to the root of humankind's creation: it traces back to mineral elements that are composed in such a way that they absorb [nutrients], grow, and replicate. This is exactly vegetative growth. Therefore, the meaning is literal, not metaphorical.

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ثُمَّ يُعِيدُكُمْ فِيها وَ يُخْرِجُكُمْ إِخْراجاً ﴿١٨﴾

(71:18) ***Then*** **(thumma)** ***He makes you return to it, and He will bring you forth again [a new] forth-bringing.***

He makes you return to it through death and placement in the grave. *He will bring you forth* on the Day of Resurrection for retribution. This verse and the one before it can be matched with the verse: *In it you will live, and in it you will die; and from it you will be raised [from the dead]* (7:25).

The word *thumma* (then) shows that "returning" is a new stage, but "bringing forth" is added to it with the conjunction "and" (the letter *wāw*) instead of another *thumma*. This shows that "returning you to the earth" and "bringing you forth from it" are part of the same process. They constitute a single act. In other words, the return is a prelude to bringing forth. Both these states belong to the abode of reality, whereas this world is an abode of illusion.

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وَ اللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ بِساطاً ﴿١٩﴾

(71:19) ***Allah has made the earth a carpet for you***

What is meant here is that "He has made the earth *like* a carpet for you," in the sense that you can conveniently move from one part of it to another, and travel across it.

لِتَسْلُكُوا مِنْها سُبُلاً فِجاجاً ﴿٢٠﴾

(71:20) ***So that you may travel over its spacious*** **(fijājan)** ***ways*** **(subulan).**"

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Subul is the plural of *sabīl*, which means *ṭarīq* (way, path). *Fijāj* is the plural of *fajj*, which means "spacious way, broad road." It has also been defined as "a path between two mountains" [that is, a ravine, a valley-way].

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1 In other words: "He made you grow from the earth vegetatively." (Trans.)

قالَ نُوحٌ رَبِّ إِنَّهُمْ عَصَوْنِي وَ اتَّبَعُوا مَنْ لَمْ يَزِدْهُ مالُهُ وَ وَلَدُهُ إِلاَّ خَساراً ﴿٢١﴾

(71:21) ***Noah said, "My Lord! They have disobeyed me, and have followed someone whose wealth and children only add to his loss.***

In this verse, Noah returns to his initial complaint of his people to his Lord, after his detailed report of his mission and what he told them, starting from the verse: *Again I called them aloud* (71:8). His first complaint of his people to God was the verse: *but my calling has only increased their evasion* (71:6), which he made after a concise reference to his mission: *My Lord! Indeed I have called my people night and day* (71:5). This verse shows that the affluent elite used to instigate the people to oppose and abuse him.

… someone whose wealth and children only add to his loss: Previously, Noah enumerated wealth and children among God's blessings [71:12]. Here he says that instead of these blessings causing his people to be grateful, they have caused them to excel in *kufr* (ungratefulness, disbelief), which entails deprivation and loss of divine mercy.

وَ مَكَرُوا مَكْراً كُبَّاراً ﴿٢٢﴾

(71:22) ***And they have plotted a mighty* (kubbāran)** ***plot."***

Kubbār is an intensive form of *kabīr* (great, big).

وَ قالُوا لا تَذَرُنَّ آلِهَتَكُمْ وَ لا تَذَرُنَّ وَدًّا وَ لا سُواعاً وَ لا يَغُوثَ وَ يَعُوقَ وَ نَسْراً ﴿٢٣﴾

(71:23) ***They have said, 'Do not abandon your gods. Do not abandon Wadd, nor Suwāʿ, nor Yaghūth, Yaʿūq and Nasr,'***

The elite among Noah's people urged others to adhere to their gods and continue worshiping them. They first made a general command to worship all idols, then they specifically named five among them: Wadd, Suwaʿ, Yaghūth, Yaʿūq and Nasr. This indicates that they had a special regard for these five idols compared to other idols. The last two are added without the negative particle *lā* (nor, not, do not), which perhaps shows that the first three were relatively more significant to them. God knows best.

وَ قَدْ أَضَلُّوا كَثِيراً وَ لا تَزِدِ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلاَّ ضَلالاً ﴿٢٤﴾

(71:24) ***and already they have led many astray. Do not increase the wrongdoers in anything but error."***

The pronoun "they"—in *they have led many astray*—refers to the elite leaders of the people. This is consistent with the previous plural pronouns which also referred to the same group: *they have plotted a mighty plot* (71:22); *They have said, 'Do not abandon your gods* (71:23). Some exegetes have suggested that the pronoun refers to their idols, which means that the idols have led the people astray. However, this interpretation is unlikely [given the context].[1]

… Do not increase the wrongdoers in anything but error: Noah prayed for the *ḍalāl* (misguidance, straying, error) of his people. Of course, this does not mean that God should take the initiative to lead them astray. Rather, God would do so as a punishment, subsequent to their misdeeds. Noah invoked God to recompense them for their disbelief and wrongdoing. This is different than his imprecation at the end of the chapter, where he requests for their extermination.

Examining Narrations

(1) Imam ʿAlī said: God has made *istighfār* (asking His forgiveness) a means for the pouring down of sustenance and mercy on the people, as He says: *Plead to your Lord for forgiveness, for indeed He is All-Forgiver. He will let loose the sky upon you showering, and will aid you with wealth and children* (71:10-12). So may God show mercy to one who takes up repentance, asks pardon for their sins, and outdistances his death [through doing righteous deeds before they are overtaken and hindered by death].[2]

Author's comment: There are numerous narrations which refer to these verses to prove that *istighfār* is a means for more sustenance.

(2) Imam ʿAlī said: Do much *istighfār* (invoke God to forgive you), and you will attract sustenance [toward yourselves].[3]

(3) Concerning *you do not speculate any weight for Allah* (71:13) Imam

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1 Perhaps these exegetes were inspired by Prophet Abraham's prayer: *My Lord… Save me and my children from worshiping idols. My Lord! Indeed they have misled many people* (14:35-36). However, as the author has pointed out, the primary meanings of these verses are different based on their contextual difference. (Trans.)

2 *Nahj al-balāghah*.

3 *Al-Khiṣāl*, part of the hadith of 400.

al-Bāqir said: That is, you do not fear[1] God's magnificence.[2]

(4) Concerning *seven heavens in layers* (ṭibāqan) (71:15) Imam al-Bāqir said: [*Ṭibāqan* means] some above others.[3]

(5) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *My Lord! They have disobeyed me, and have followed someone whose wealth and children only add to his loss* (70:21): They followed the rich.

(6) Ibn ʿAbbās said: The same idols and gods of Noah's people were handed down to the Arabs. Wadd was inherited by tribe Kalb, which inhabited Dūmat al-Jandal; Suwāʿ by tribe Hudhayl; Yaghūth by tribe Murād and later by [their branch] Banū Ghuṭayf, which inhabited Sabāʾ; Yaʿūq by tribe Hamdān; and Nasr by tribe Ḥimyar, [specifically] the family of Dhū al-Kalāʿ.

These were originally the names of five righteous people among Noah's people. When they passed away, Satan inspired the people to erect monuments in their names, in the same place where they used to sit [to meditate and worship]. They acted accordingly, but the statues were not worshiped until that generation passed away and their story was lost.[4]

Author's comment: Perhaps what is meant here—that the same idols of Noah's people were transmitted to the Arabs—is that the Arabs had idols with the same names or attributes. However, it is very unlikely that the exact same objects were literally passed down to the Arabs.

(7) Al-Mufaḍḍal says: Imam al-Ṣādiq told me, "Noah built his Ark with his own hands [here] in the Mosque of Kūfah. He had to bring in the wood from a far place, until its construction was complete."… Then the Imam turned left, pointed to where the house of Dāriyyayn was—which is where Ibn Ḥakīm resided,

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1 In other words, *rajāʾ* (hope, speculation) is interpreted as *khawf* (fear), and *waqār* (weight) is interpreted as *ʿaẓamah* (greatness, magnificence, grandeur). (Trans.)

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd. The same idea is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās through Sunni chains of narration.

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Bukhārī, Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Mardawayh. The same account is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq in *ʿIlal al-aharāʾiʿ*, via its chain of narration.

and which is now a part of Euphrates—and said, "O Mufaḍḍal! This is where the idols of Noah's people were installed: Yaghūth, Yaʿūq and Nasr."[1]

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1 *Rawḍat al-kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

Verses 25-28

مِمَّا خَطِيئاتِهِمْ أُغْرِقُوا فَأُدْخِلُوا ناراً فَلَمْ يَجِدُوا لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَنْصاراً ﴿٢٥﴾ وَ قالَ نُوحٌ رَبِّ لا تَذَرْ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ مِنَ الْكافِرِينَ دَيَّاراً ﴿٢٦﴾ إِنَّكَ إِنْ تَذَرْهُمْ يُضِلُّوا عِبادَكَ وَ لا يَلِدُوا إِلاَّ فاجِراً كَفَّاراً ﴿٢٧﴾ رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَ لِوالِدَيَّ وَ لِمَنْ دَخَلَ بَيْتِيَ مُؤْمِناً وَ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَ الْمُؤْمِناتِ وَ لا تَزِدِ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلاَّ تَباراً ﴿٢٨﴾

(71:25) *Because of their sins they were drowned, then made to enter a fire. And they found they had no helpers apart from Allah.*
(71:26) *And Noah said: "My Lord! Do not leave on the earth any inhabitant from among the disbelievers.*
(71:27) *If You leave them, they will lead astray Your servants and will only beget wholly disbelieving degenerates.*
(71:28) *My Lord! Forgive me and my parents, and whoever enters my house in faith, and the faithful men and women, and do not increase the wrongdoers in aught save ruin."*

Introduction & Commentary

These verses relate the extermination of Noah's people, and Noah's further curse on them.

مِمَّا خَطِيئاتِهِمْ أُغْرِقُوا فَأُدْخِلُوا ناراً فَلَمْ يَجِدُوا لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَنْصاراً ﴿٢٥﴾

(71:25) ***Because of*** **(min-mā)** ***their sins*** **(khaṭīʾātihim)** ***they were drowned, then made to enter a fire. And they found they had no helpers apart from Allah.***

The meaning is: "Because of their sins, Noah's people were drowned—in the storm—and were made—by God—to enter such a fire whose intensity of punishment is inestimable."[1]

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1 *Khaṭīʾāt* is synonymous with *maʿāṣī* (acts of disobedience) and *dhunūb* (sins). The indefinite form of the word "a fire" (*nāran*) indicates aggrandizement. The Arabic preposition *min* (from) [in *min-mā*] signifies the origin of a movement

There is a delicate juxtaposition of opposites in this verse, which mentions both drowning in water and entering a fire. This fire is part of *barzakh* (the intermediate realm between this life and the resurrection), where the sinners will be punished after their death until the resurrection. This verse is among the Qur'anic proofs for the existence of *barzakh*. Some exegetes have suggested that the verse could be referring to the fire in the hereafter (*ākhirah*), but that is an unfounded interpretation. The verse does not say that Noah's people *will soon* enter a fire upon the resurrection.[1]

… And they found they had no helpers apart from Allah: That is, no helpers to save them from death or punishment. This alludes to their idols and gods.

وَ قالَ نُوحٌ رَبِّ لا تَذَرْ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ مِنَ الْكافِرِينَ دَيَّاراً ﴿٢٦﴾

(71:26) ***And Noah said: "My Lord! Do not leave on the earth any inhabitant*** **(dayyāran)** ***from among the disbelievers.***

Dayyār means "one who settles in a home" (*nāzil al-dār*; that is, inhabitant, resident, dweller). This verse presents another curse of Noah against his people. The preceding verse—*Because of their sins they were drowned…* (25)—was rather a side note or parenthetical remark inserted between the two parts of Noah's curse, meant to show that they were indeed drowned because of their sins, as Noah imprecated. It also sets the stage for the next part of Noah's curse [in this verse], where he prays for their total extermination. Overall, the verses show that their drowning was an answer to Noah's curse, and that this punishment wiped them from the face of the earth in their entirety.

إِنَّكَ إِنْ تَذَرْهُمْ يُضِلُّوا عِبادَكَ وَ لا يَلِدُوا إِلاَّ فاجِراً كَفَّاراً ﴿٢٧﴾

(71:27) ***If You leave them, they will lead astray Your servants, and will only beget wholly disbelieving*** **(kaffāran)** ***degenerates*** **(fājiran, from fujūr).**

Fujūr (impiety, evil-doing, decadence) means abhorrent sin. *Kaffār*

(called *ibtidāʾ al-ghāyah*). In the context of this verse it implies justification (because, due to, as a result of). The particle *mā* in *min-mā* is *zāʾidah* (extra, redundant, semantically empty), added for emphasis. (Auth.)

1 This is deduced from the use of the letter *fāʾ* instead of the word *thumma*. The former indicates immediate sequence, while the latter indicates delayed sequence. (Trans.)

means one with an intense degree of kufr (disbelief, ungratefulness). Here Noah justifies his curse for their total extermination. His argument is that their survival will not be of any benefit to anyone: It does not benefit the believers, since their only function is to serve the people astray; nor will it benefit their own children, since they will only give birth to sinful disbelievers. Noah knew these qualities about them based on divine revelation, as we explained in Sūrah Hūd [11:36-49].[1]

رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَ لِوالِدَيَّ وَ لِمَنْ دَخَلَ بَيْتِيَ مُؤْمِناً وَ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَ الْمُؤْمِناتِ وَ لا تَزِدِ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلاَّ تَباراً ﴿٢٨﴾

(71:28) ***My Lord! Forgive me and my parents, and whoever enters my house in faith, and the faithful men and women, and do not increase the wrongdoers in aught save ruin.***

Whoever enters my house refers to the believers among his people. *The faithful men and women* refers to all believers until the Day of Resurrection.

***… and do not increase the wrongdoers in aught save ruin* (tabāran):** *Tabār* means *halāk* (death, destruction, perdition). Apparently, what is meant by *tabār* (ruin) here is "that which leads to otherworldly punishment as well as worldly destruction—through drowning," as he requested both of these previously [in verses 71:24 and 7:26]. This curse is the last speech of Noah narrated in the Qur'an.

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1 See verse 11:36 in particular. (Trans.)

Chapter 72

al-Jinn (The Jinn)

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Verses 1-17

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمنِ الرَّحِيمِ

قُلْ أُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ أَنَّهُ اسْتَمَعَ نَفَرٌ مِنَ الْجِنِّ فَقالُوا إِنَّا سَمِعْنا قُرْآناً عَجَباً ﴿١﴾ يَهْدِي
إِلَى الرُّشْدِ فَآمَنَّا بِهِ وَ لَنْ نُشْرِكَ بِرَبِّنا أَحَداً ﴿٢﴾ وَ أَنَّهُ تَعالى جَدُّ رَبِّنا مَا اتَّخَذَ
صاحِبَةً وَ لا وَلَداً ﴿٣﴾ وَ أَنَّهُ كانَ يَقُولُ سَفِيهُنا عَلَى اللَّهِ شَطَطاً ﴿٤﴾ وَ أَنَّا ظَنَنَّا أَنْ
لَنْ تَقُولَ الْإِنْسُ وَ الْجِنُّ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِباً ﴿٥﴾ وَ أَنَّهُ كانَ رِجالٌ مِنَ الْإِنْسِ يَعُوذُونَ
بِرِجالٍ مِنَ الْجِنِّ فَزادُوهُمْ رَهَقاً ﴿٦﴾ وَ أَنَّهُمْ ظَنُّوا كَما ظَنَنْتُمْ أَنْ لَنْ يَبْعَثَ اللَّهُ
أَحَداً ﴿٧﴾ وَ أَنَّا لَمَسْنَا السَّماءَ فَوَجَدْناها مُلِئَتْ حَرَساً شَدِيداً وَ شُهُباً ﴿٨﴾ وَ أَنَّا
كُنَّا نَقْعُدُ مِنْها مَقاعِدَ لِلسَّمْعِ فَمَنْ يَسْتَمِعِ الْآنَ يَجِدْ لَهُ شِهاباً رَصَداً ﴿٩﴾ وَ أَنَّا
لا نَدْرِي أَ شَرٌّ أُرِيدَ بِمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَمْ أَرادَ بِهِمْ رَبُّهُمْ رَشَداً ﴿١٠﴾ وَ أَنَّا مِنَّا
الصَّالِحُونَ وَ مِنَّا دُونَ ذلِكَ كُنَّا طَرائِقَ قِدَداً ﴿١١﴾ وَ أَنَّا ظَنَنَّا أَنْ لَنْ نُعْجِزَ اللَّهَ فِي
الْأَرْضِ وَ لَنْ نُعْجِزَهُ هَرَباً ﴿١٢﴾ وَ أَنَّا لَمَّا سَمِعْنَا الْهُدى آمَنَّا بِهِ فَمَنْ يُؤْمِنْ بِرَبِّهِ
فَلا يَخافُ بَخْساً وَ لا رَهَقاً ﴿١٣﴾ وَ أَنَّا مِنَّا الْمُسْلِمُونَ وَ مِنَّا الْقاسِطُونَ فَمَنْ أَسْلَمَ
فَأُولئِكَ تَحَرَّوْا رَشَداً ﴿١٤﴾ وَ أَمَّا الْقاسِطُونَ فَكانُوا لِجَهَنَّمَ حَطَباً ﴿١٥﴾ وَ أَنْ لَوِ
اسْتَقامُوا عَلَى الطَّرِيقَةِ لَأَسْقَيْناهُمْ ماءً غَدَقاً ﴿١٦﴾ لِنَفْتِنَهُمْ فِيهِ وَ مَنْ يُعْرِضْ عَنْ
ذِكْرِ رَبِّهِ يَسْلُكْهُ عَذاباً صَعَداً ﴿١٧﴾

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

(72:1) *Say: It is revealed unto me that indeed a company of the Jinn gave ear, and they said, "Indeed we heard a wonderful recitation,*

(72:2) *which guides to rectitude. Hence we have believed in it and we will never ascribe any partner to our Lord.*

(72:3) *And exalted be the glory of our Lord, He has taken neither any spouse nor son.*

(72:4) *Indeed the foolish one among us used to utter atrocious lies concerning Allah.*

(72:5) *Indeed we thought that the humans and the jinn would never utter any falsehood concerning Allah.*

(72:6) *Indeed some persons from the humans would seek the protection of some persons from the jinn, thus they would only add to their rebellion.*

(72:7) *They thought, just as you think, that Allah would not raise anyone.*

(72:8) *We had sought the heaven but had found it filled with strong warders and meteors.*

(72:9) *We used to sit in its positions to eavesdrop, but anyone listening now finds a flame waiting for him*

(72:10) *We do not know whether evil is intended for those who are in the earth, or whether their Lord intends guidance for them.*

(72:11) *Among us some are righteous and some of us are otherwise: we are multifarious sects.*

(72:12) *We know that we cannot thwart Allah on the earth, nor can we thwart Him by fleeing.*

(72:13) *When we heard the [message of] guidance, we believed in it. So whoever that has faith in his Lord shall neither fear any loss nor oppression.*

(72:14) *And there are among us some who have submitted and some who are perverse. Those who submit [to Allah]—it is they who pursue rectitude.*

(72:15) *As for the perverse, they will be firewood for hell."*

(72:16) *And indeed if they are steadfast on the path [of Allah], We shall provide them with abundant water,*

(72:17) *so that We may test them therein, and whoever turns away from the remembrance of his Lord, He will let him into an escalating punishment.*

Introduction & Commentary

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 28 verses. The sūrah narrates the story of a group of jinn who listened to the Qur'an, believed in it, and accepted its precepts. The story is used to affirm the mission of the Prophet, God's oneness as a Lord, and the hereafter. The sūrah's content shows that it is Meccan.

قُلْ أُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ أَنَّهُ اسْتَمَعَ نَفَرٌ مِنَ الْجِنِّ فَقَالُوا إِنَّا سَمِعْنَا قُرْآنًا عَجَبًا ﴿١﴾ يَهْدِي
إِلَى الرُّشْدِ فَآمَنَّا بِهِ ۖ وَلَنْ نُشْرِكَ بِرَبِّنَا أَحَدًا ﴿٢﴾

(72:1-2) ***Say: It is revealed unto me that indeed a company* (nafar) *of the Jinn gave ear, and they said: "Indeed we heard a wonderful* (ʿajaban) *recitation, which guides to rectitude* (al-rushd). *Hence we have believed in it and we will never ascribe any partner to our Lord.***

God orders the Prophet to relate this story to his people. The clause, *It is revealed* is in the passive voice, where the subject is God. *The Jinn gave ear* to the Qur'an, but this object [to which they gave ear] is omitted since it is understood from the next part of the verse. *Nafar* is commonly defined as "a group of from three to nine people." According to some exegetes, its upper limit is forty. *ʿAjab* means "something amusing and pleasing due to being unusual." They described the Qur'an as *ʿajab* (amusing, wonderful, marvellous) because it is an extraordinary speech—in terms of both form and content—which was brought by an unschooled individual who could neither read nor write. *Rushd* (growth, integrity, right course, rectitude) means "attaining the truth." It is the opposite of *ghayy* (error, straying, loss, degeneration). The Qur'an guides to the right course by preaching beliefs and actions that lead to true happiness, if one adopts and realizes them.

The meaning is, "O Messenger! Say to the people that it has been revealed to me—by God—that an assembly of the jinn listened to the Qur'an. Then, upon returning to their people, they said to them, 'Indeed we have heard an amazing and extraordinary recitation (lit. *qurʾān*). It guides one to certain theoretical and practical teachings which, if adopted and realized, will surely make one reach the truth and attain real happiness.'"

… Hence we have believed in it…: This sentence reflects the jinn's belief in the Qur'an, and their confirmation of its truth.

… and we will never ascribe any partner to our Lord…: This effectively reiterates their belief in the Qur'an. It shows that their belief in the Qur'an

is tantamount to their belief in God Who has revealed the Qur'an. Thus they accepted Him as their Lord. They also clarified that they have a monotheistic belief in God, without ever associating any partners with Him.

Discussion Concerning the Jinn

The jinn are creatures who are not perceivable with our senses, but their existence is acknowledged by the Qur'an. The Qur'an describes them as follows:

(1) They were created before humankind.

(2) They were created from fire, just as humans were created from dust: *and We created the jinn earlier out of a piercing fire* (15:27).

(3) They live, die, and will be resurrected, much like humankind: *Such are those on whom the Word concerning nations of the Jinn and humankind* (46:18).

(4) They have male and female sexes, through which they procreate: *Indeed some persons from the humans would seek the protection of some persons from the jinn* (72:6).

(5) They possess intelligence and free will, through which they can carry out arduous tasks. Some examples of this are to be found in the stories of Prophet Solomon in the Qur'an, including the subservience of the jinn to him, and the story of the Queen of Sheba.[1]

(6) They are subject to religious obligations, just like humankind. They have believers and disbelievers, pious and impious. God says: *I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may serve Me* (51:56); *Indeed we heard a wonderful recitation* (72:1); *And there are among us some who have submitted and some who are perverse.* (72:14); *Among us some are righteous and some of us are otherwise* (72:11); *They [the jinn] said: "O our people! Indeed we have heard a Scripture which has been revealed after Moses, confirming that which was before it, guiding unto the truth and a right road"* (46:30-31). There are other verses in the Qur'an which describe their qualities.

(7) Iblīs (Satan) is one of the jinn, and he has descendants and followers: *He [Iblīs] was one of the jinn, so he transgressed against his Lord's command. Will you then take him and his offspring for*

1 See verses 2:102, 21:82, 27:12-14, 38:37-38. (Trans.)

guardians in My stead? (18:50); *Indeed he sees you—he and his hosts—whence you do not see them* (7:27).

وَأَنَّهُ تَعَالَىٰ جَدُّ رَبِّنَا مَا اتَّخَذَ صَاحِبَةً وَلَا وَلَدًا ﴿٣﴾

(72:3) ***And*** **(wa-annahu)** ***exalted be the glory*** **(jadd)** ***of our Lord, He has taken neither any spouse nor son.***

The word *jadd* has been defined in two ways: (1) synonymous with *ʿaẓamah* (greatness, magnificence, grandeur);[1] (2) synonymous with *ḥaẓẓ* (share, fortune, endowment, resources).[2] The verse emphasizes what they said previously: *we will never ascribe any partner to our Lord* (72:2).

The particle *anna* is repeated twelve times at the beginning of these verses, starting here, up to verse 72:14. It has been recited with both *fatḥah* and *kasrah* inflections (as *annahu* and *innahu*, respectively). The former is the more common recitation, but the latter is more consistent and semantically preferred, because the context clearly shows that these verses are the speech of the jinn [which began with *innā*, with *kasrah*, in verse 72:1]. Reciting it as *anna* does not have a clear and straightforward meaning. Some exegetes have tried to justify it as follows:

(1) The conjunction "and" at the beginning of these verses does not join the verse to *innā* in verse 72:1 ("we" in *Indeed we heard…*), but joins it to the pronoun "it" in *Hence we have believed in it* (72:2). The implied meaning is: "We have believed in it, and we have also believed in the fact that exalted is the glory of our Lord…" In other words, the verse is saying that unlike the idolaters, the jinn do not believe in God having a spouse and children. This justification is permitted by the Kufan grammarians.

(2) The Basran grammarians do not permit the conjunction "and" connecting to the pronoun "it" [in verse 72:2]. Instead, some of them—like al-Farrāʾ, al-Zajjāj, and al-Zamakhsharī—have suggested that the conjunction "and" adds the verse to the place (*maḥall*) of *in it* (72:2) which is grammatically *manṣūb* in terms of inflection, because *in it* is the object of

1 The meaning would be: "Our Lord is far too grand to have a spouse or a child." (Trans.)

2 The meaning would be: "Our Lord is so rich that He does not need a spouse or a child." (Trans.)

we have believed (72:2). The meaning of *Hence we have believed in it* (72:2) is: "We acknowledge and confirm this message." Thus they continue to say: "We also acknowledge and confirm that *exalted be the glory of our Lord*."

Comment: The reader would concur that this justification is contrived.

(3) There is an omitted letter *bā'* (in, to) at the beginning of these verses, making them comparable to their object of belief in verse 72:2. The implied meaning would be: "We have believed in it, and in the fact that exalted be the glory of our Lord."[1]

Comment: A common problem with all these justifications is that they would only be applicable to this verse and the next one, but not the rest of the verses which also start with *annahu*, such as: *Indeed the foolish ones among us used to utter…* (72:4); *Indeed we thought that…* (72:5); *Indeed some persons from the humans…* (72:6). We cannot interpret those subsequent verses as saying, "We believe and confirm that *we thought that the humans and the jinn would never utter any falsehood concerning Allah* (72:5)"; "We believe and confirm that *some persons from the humans would seek the protection of some persons from the jinn* (72:6)"; "We believe and confirm that *we had sought the heaven* (72:8)."

(4) As the first two verses are justified by an implied omitted part—such as "we believe" or "we confirm"—then a similar omitted clause can be assumed in the subsequent verses, according to the content of each verse.[2]

Comment: This is the only acceptable way to explain the reading of *annahu* with *fatḥah* [instead of *innahu* with *kasrah*].

(5) The word *annahu* at the beginning of these verses is a repetition of the same word at the beginning of the chapter: *It is revealed unto me that* (annahu) *a company of the Jinn gave ear…* (72:1).

Comment: This claim is implausible. These verses give the Prophet a report of what the jinn said, starting by: *Indeed we heard a wonderful recitation… Hence we have believed in it* (72:1-2). The verses then continue to narrate more of their speech. If the word *annahu* (that) at the beginning of all subsequent verses was a repetition of the word in the first verse, then it means a repetition of *It is revealed unto me that* (72:1) at the beginning of all verses. The meaning would be: "*It is revealed unto me that exalted*

1 This is effectively the same as the first view. (Trans.)

2 Some examples are: "And we acknowledge that…"; "And the truth is that…"; "And we state that…" (Trans.)

be the glory of our Lord… It is revealed unto me that indeed the foolish one among us used to utter…"

If the word *annahu* (that) were not part of their speech, then its repetition would be redundant, and would interfere with the natural flow of the discussion. And if it were part of their speech—which is being narrated verbatim here—then what is narrated from them would not have a complete meaning, but it would require some implied omitted clause to make the verses meaningful. Therefore, this justification does not solve the problem in any way. The reader should contemplate this.[1]

وَأَنَّهُ كَانَ يَقُولُ سَفِيهُنَا عَلَى اللَّهِ شَطَطًا ﴿٤﴾

(72:4) ***Indeed the foolish*** **(safīhunā, from safah)** ***one among us used to utter atrocious lies*** **(shaṭaṭan)** ***concerning Allah.***

According to al-Rāghib, *safah* means "frivolity of the soul" due to imprudence and foolishness. *Shaṭaṭ* means "a speech that is far from truth."

This verse further emphasizes the clause, *and we will never ascribe any partner to our Lord* (72:2). *The foolish one among us* refers to all polytheists among the jinn who lived before them. Some exegetes have suggested that it refers to Satan (Iblīs), who was one of the jinn. However, this is incommensurate with the context of the verse, since it says: *Indeed the foolish ones among us used to utter…*[2]

وَأَنَّا ظَنَنَّا أَنْ لَنْ تَقُولَ الْإِنْسُ وَالْجِنُّ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا ﴿٥﴾

(72:5) ***Indeed we thought that the humans and the jinn would never utter any falsehood concerning Allah.***

Here the jinn state that they thought the humans and the other jinn were truthful and would never utter any falsehood concerning God. That is why when they heard from the polytheists that God has a wife and

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1 In other words, if the subsequent verses are a continuous report of what the jinn said, then the word "that" would make each verse incomplete. It would need some predicate to complement it. And if the word "that" is not part of what they said, then it would be an unnecessary interruption in the middle of their statements. (Trans.)

2 "Used to utter" (*kāna yaqūlu*) implies an ongoing practice up to the time of revelation. Hence, it is not compatible with Satan's blasphemy at the onset of creation. (Trans.)

children, they believed them, followed their path, and thus became polytheists. That continued until they heard the Qur'an, which unveiled the truth for them. Therefore, in this verse they denounce the polytheists among both the humans and the jinn.

وَأَنَّهُ كَانَ رِجَالٌ مِنَ الْإِنْسِ يَعُوذُونَ بِرِجَالٍ مِنَ الْجِنِّ فَزَادُوهُمْ رَهَقًا ﴿٦﴾

(72:6) ***Indeed some persons from the humans would seek the protection*** **(yaʿūdhūna, from ʿawdh)** ***of some persons from the jinn, thus they would only add to their rebellion*** **(rahaqan).**

According to al-Rāghib, *ʿawdh* means "seeking refuge in someone else," and the verb *rahaqa* is used when someone is forcefully covered by an event. Other suggested interpretations for *rahq* are: (1) Sin. (2) Revolt. (3) Fear. (4) Evil. (5) Humiliation. (6) Weakness. These are all implications of the same original meaning [quoted from al-Rāghib].

It is said that humans seeking protection from the jinn alludes to an Arab custom. When they had to stay in a desert at night, they would say, "I take refuge in the chief of this desert from the harms of the foolish ones among his people." According to Muqātil, the people who first took refuge in the protection of the jinn were a tribe from Yemen. They were followed by Banū Ḥanīfah tibe, and then it spread among all Arabs.

Another possibility is that the people would seek help from the jinn through divination (*kahānah*) in order to achieve their goal. Some have said that it means humans referring to other humans in order to protect them against the harm, suffering and death caused by the jinn. This interpretation also reduces to the idea of divination.

… thus they would only add to their rebellion: There are two possible combinations for the pronouns in this sentence: (1) The subject "they" in *they would only add* refers to humans, and "their" refers to the jinn. The meaning would be: "Some humans would add to the rebellion of the jinn by taking refuge in them, causing the jinn to transgress and sin." (2) The other way around, where the subject "they" in *they would only add* refers to the jinn, while "their" refers to humans. The meaning would be: "The jinn would cause the humans to increase in *rahaq*," where *rahaq* can mean either (1) sin and rebellion; or (2) humiliation and fear.

وَأَنَّهُمْ ظَنُّوا كَمَا ظَنَنْتُمْ أَنْ لَنْ يَبْعَثَ اللَّهُ أَحَدًا ﴿٧﴾

(72:7) ***They thought, just as you think, that Allah would not raise***

anyone.

The antecedent of the pronoun "they" is *some persons from the humans* (72:6). The jinn said this to address their fellow members from the jinn. "Raising" here means God appointing someone as His messenger. The polytheists did not believe in [the possibility of] messengership [of humans]. Some have said that "raising" here refers to resurrecting the dead. However, the context of the following verses confirms the first meaning.

Some exegetes have suggested that this verse and the preceding one are not the speech of the jinn, but they are the words of God, inserted parenthetically in the midst of verses which narrate from the jinn. Accordingly, the pronoun "they" in this verse would refer to the jinn, while the pronoun "you" would be addressed to humans [that is, the audience of the Qur'an]. However, this interpretation interrupts the consistent theme and flow of the verses.

وَأَنَّا لَمَسْنَا السَّمَاءَ فَوَجَدْنَاهَا مُلِئَتْ حَرَسًا شَدِيدًا وَشُهُبًا ﴿٨﴾

(72:8) ***We had sought*** **(lamasnā, from lams)** ***the heaven but had found it filled with strong warders*** **(ḥarasan)** ***and meteors.***

What is meant by *lams* (lit. touching) in this verse is "approaching the heavens by rising toward them." *Ḥaras* is defined as the plural of *ḥāris* (guard, protector, watch).[1] *Strong warders* are guards who are powerful in deflecting anyone who tries to eavesdrop in the heavens. It is followed by *meteors* as the weapons used by the warders.

وَأَنَّا كُنَّا نَقْعُدُ مِنْهَا مَقَاعِدَ لِلسَّمْعِ ۖ فَمَنْ يَسْتَمِعِ الْآنَ يَجِدْ لَهُ شِهَابًا رَصَدًا ﴿٩﴾

(72:9) ***We used to sit in its positions to eavesdrop, but anyone listening now finds a flame waiting for him***

When we consider the first half of this verse along with the preceding verse, we can deduce that it was rather a new incident that the heavens were *filled with strong warders and meteors* (72:8). Otherwise, formerly the jinn could freely approach the heavens and sit in places to hear the speech of the angels.

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1 It is used with the adjective *shadīd* (strong) in the singular form because it is a plural noun. (Auth.)

A plural noun is treated as a singular term. (Trans.)

The letter *fā*ʾ in *fa-man* (but anyone) shows that the second half of the verse is a consequence of everything mentioned so far. It means: "So from now on, if anyone sits there to eavesdrop, there will come at them a meteor that had been awaiting them ."

This verse and the last one show that the jinn came across a new heavenly event that coincided with the revelation of the Qur'an and the mission of the Prophet. The event was that the jinn were impeded from receiving the news of the heavens through eavesdropping.

Some exegetes have made a strange inference from these verses: The heavens were also guarded before the Prophet's mission, and the jinn were stoned, but the difference was that after his mission, the heavens were *filled* with warders, as the verse says: *filled with strong warders* (72:8). Likewise, the apparent meaning of the current verse—*we used to sit on places [high] therein to listen*—is that there used to be some empty spots which were free of guards and meteors, but now all the seats are taken. That is why if any one wishes to eavesdrop, they will be treated with meteors.

Comment: the point of the verses is not that the heavens are now filled with warders and abundant meteors, as opposed to before, when there were some empty seats available in them. If that were the intended meaning, the second half of the verse should have specified *all* places of eavesdropping as opposed to *some* of them. However, the verse does not get into such an elaboration, but only mentions listening: *But anyone who listens now*.[1]

Objection: Listening is mentioned in an unqualified form, which is compatible with the view that *all* seats—as opposed to *some* seats—of eavesdropping are now occupied.

Response: Even if so, it is clear that the point of mentioning this change of circumstances is to show a new incident with respect to the stoning of the jinn. The same can be inferred from the qualification *now* in the verse: *But anyone who listens now*. The new incident was that the jinn were repelled from *all* the spots, in contrast to the past when they could

1 In other words, we cannot prove whether or not the heavens were guarded prior to the Prophet's mission. That is not deducible from the verse. All we can say is that after the Prophet's mission, the jinn were completely banned from eavesdropping. (Trans.)

eavesdrop freely in *some* spots. This much suffices to show our point.[1]

It should be noted that the new event was not the emergence of meteors per se, but the stoning of the jinn with guarding meteors. Therefore, the claim that meteors existed even before the Prophet's mission and the revelation of the Qur'an does not prove that the jinn were also deflected by them previously. That is irrelevant because the Qur'anic verses do not reject the existence of meteors altogether, but they talk about their new function. We discussed this topic in Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt.[2]

وَأَنَّا لَا نَدْرِي أَشَرٌّ أُرِيدَ بِمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَمْ أَرَادَ بِهِمْ رَبُّهُمْ رَشَدًا ﴿١٠﴾

(72:10) ***We do not know whether evil is intended for those who are in the earth, or whether their Lord intends guidance*** **(rushdan)** ***for them.***

Rashad and *rushd* are the opposite of *ghayy* (error, straying, misguidance). The indefinite form of *rashadan* indicates a specific kind of guidance.

Here the jinn express their ignorance and confusion. They observed that they were lapidated and banned from hearing the news of the heavens, and realized that this had to do something with the inhabitants of the earth. However, they were uncertain whether it was some evil or some good that was in store for them. If it were good, it would be a form of guidance and happiness. That is why instead of saying "good" in contrast to "evil," they used the word "guidance." This is also confirmed by the phrase, *their Lord intends guidance for them*, because the expression indicates divine grace and mercy.[3]

The jinn showed their courtesy by expressing guidance in the active voice [ascribed to God], but omitting the subject in the case of evil by using the passive voice. In addition to the courtesy of expression, evil is not willed by God for anyone unless the person qualifies for it [through their misdeeds].

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1 The author's point is that the Prophet's mission and the revelation of the Qur'an marked a new stage in terms of the jinn's access to the news of the heaven. This is compatible either way: whether we hold that they had full access or limited access prior to that. (Trans.)

2 See the author's discussion under verses 37:1-11. (Trans.)

3 Referring to God as *their Lord* points to God's direction of His servants to the right course, out of His Lordly care and compassion for them. (Trans.)

وَأَنَّا مِنَّا الصَّالِحُونَ وَمِنَّا دُونَ ذَٰلِكَ ۖ كُنَّا طَرَائِقَ قِدَدًا ﴿١١﴾

(72:11) ***Among us some are righteous*** **(al-ṣāliḥūn, from ṣalāḥ)** ***and some of us are otherwise: we are multifarious sects*** **(ṭarāʾiq qidadan).**

Ṣalāḥ is the opposite of *ṭalāḥ* (wickedness, degeneration, corruption). Some have interpreted the preposition *dūna* (lit. under, below) as "near." The meaning would be: "Some others of us come close to righteousness." However, what is meant by *dūna* is *ghayra* (other), meaning a quality that is completely distinct and different from righteousness. This can be confirmed by the subsequent part of the verse, which indicates discord and disunity: *we are multifarious sects*. Their ways are described as diverse in order to show that they are distinct from one another, where each leads its travelers to a different destination. That is why *qidad* is sometimes interpreted as various and scattered.[1]

Apparently *righteous* here means one's natural tendency in interactions. It does not mean *religious* righteousness. If that were the intended meaning, it would have been better to mention it after making reference to their faith: *When we heard the [message of] guidance, we believed in it* (72:13).

There are three possible meanings for the last part of the verse:

(1) "We are *in* multifarious sects." This is the view of some exegetes, saying that *multifarious sects* is a container.[2]

(2) "We *have* multifarious sects." This is according to other exegetes, holding that there is an omitted word *dhawī* (sing. *dhū*, possessor) in the verse.

(3) Perhaps their expression is a metaphor, without involving an omission. They likened themselves to diverse paths that lead to different destinations, as a way of reflecting their differences and gaps.

The meaning is: "Some of us are naturally inclined to good, while

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1 *Ṭarāʾiq* is the plural of *ṭarīqah*, which means "a way that is practiced and followed." *Qidad* is the plural of *qiddah*, which is synonymous with *qiṭʿah* (piece, division, section). *Qidad* (diverse, differing, multifarious) is the adjective of *ṭarāʾiq* (sects, ways, orders). (Auth.)

2 It is *manṣūb* in terms of inflection (in the accusative form) because the preposition *fī* (in) is omitted in the verse. (Auth.)

some others are not like that. We are *in* various paths; or we *have* various paths; or we are *like* diverging ways."

وَأَنَّا ظَنَنَّا أَنْ لَنْ نُعْجِزَ اللَّهَ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَنْ نُعْجِزَهُ هَرَبًا ﴿١٢﴾

(72:12) ***We know*** **(ẓanannā, from ẓann)** ***that we cannot thwart Allah on the earth, nor can we thwart Him by fleeing.***

Ẓann in this verse means "certain knowledge." Apparently *we cannot thwart Allah on the earth* means opposing the divine will by making mischief on the earth and breaking His system that governs the world. That is impossible because any mischief that they make would also be part of His system [of cause and effect]. *Nor can we thwart Him by fleeing* means that they have no escape from Him if He wills to pursue them.

Some exegetes have offered another meaning for the verse: "We cannot thwart God while we are on the earth, nor can we thwart Him by fleeing to the heavens. That is, we can thwart Him neither in the earth nor in the heavens. " The problem with this interpretation should be clear.[1]

وَأَنَّا لَمَّا سَمِعْنَا الْهُدَىٰ آمَنَّا بِهِ ۖ فَمَنْ يُؤْمِنْ بِرَبِّهِ فَلَا يَخَافُ بَخْسًا وَلَا رَهَقًا ﴿١٣﴾

(72:13) ***When we heard the [message of] guidance, we believed in it. So whoever*** **(fa-man)** ***that has faith in his Lord shall neither fear any loss*** **(bakhsan)** ***nor oppression*** **(rahaqan).**

Guidance here means the Qur'an, in the sense that it *includes* guidance. *Bakhs* means "an unjust deficiency." *Rahaq* means "being overtaken by hardship." The letter *fā'* in *fa-man* (so whoever) indicates the reasons for a conclusion that was stated earlier. It shows their proof for believing in the Qur'an right away, without any hesitation.

The meaning is: "As soon as we heard the Qur'an—which is guidance—we believed in it, since whoever believes in it has believed in his Lord. And one who believes in his Lord shall fear neither any loss of good nor any wrongful hardship. Since this does not result in any loss or hardship, why should one doubt or hesitate about acting upon it right away?"

وَأَنَّا مِنَّا الْمُسْلِمُونَ وَمِنَّا الْقَاسِطُونَ ۖ فَمَنْ أَسْلَمَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ تَحَرَّوْا رَشَدًا ﴿١٤﴾

(72:14) ***And there are among us some who have submitted***

1 The problem is that there is no mention of "heavens" in the verse, and no indication to assume any reference to it. (Trans.)

(al-muslimūn) ***and some who are perverse*** **(al-qāsiṭūn).** ***Those who submit [to Allah]—it is they who pursue*** **(taḥarraw, from taḥarrī)** ***rectitude.***

Taḥarrī means "seeking and aiming for something." What is meant by *islām* in this verse is *taslīm* (submission, surrender) to the divine command. *Muslimūn* are those who have surrendered their affairs to God, and obey what He has willed and ordered. *Qāsiṭūn* are "those who incline toward falsehood." *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: "*Qāsiṭ* is one who turns *away* from the truth, while *muqsiṭ* is one who turns *toward* the truth."

The meaning is: "We—the community of jinn—are divided in two groups: some of us are submissive and obedient to God's command, and some deviate from His command, which is the truth. Those who have submitted are those who have aimed for the truth and reality."

وَأَمَّا الْقَاسِطُونَ فَكَانُوا لِجَهَنَّمَ حَطَبًا ﴿١٥﴾

(72:15) ***As for the perverse, they will be firewood for hell."***

They will be tormented in hell as their very selves and souls will catch fire in hell. The same is true about unjust humans, as God says: *Then beware the fire whose fuel will be humans* (2:24). Many exegetes have considered the descriptions of their ends—from *Those who submit* (72:14) to *firewood for hell* (72:15)—as the last part of the jinn's speech with their people. Others have suggested that these are God's statements, addressed to the Prophet.

وَأَنْ لَوِ اسْتَقَامُوا عَلَى الطَّرِيقَةِ لَأَسْقَيْنَاهُمْ مَاءً غَدَقًا ﴿١٦﴾

(72:16) ***And indeed*** **(an)** ***if they are steadfast on the path [of Allah], We shall provide them with abundant*** **(ghadaqan)** ***water,***

The Arabic particle *an* at the beginning of this verse is an unstressed form of *anna* (indeed, truly, certainly). The conjunction "and" connects this verse to the first verse of the chapter: *that indeed* (annahu) *a company of the Jinn gave ear* (72:1). *The path* means the path of submission. Being *steadfast* on it means observing its requirements and implications, including belief in God and His communications. *Ghadaq* means "profuse, abundant." Perhaps *abundant water* is a metaphor for material expansion in general. This can be corroborated by the next verse: *So that We may test them therein* (72:17). This makes the verse comparable to the verse: *If the people of the towns had been faithful and Godwary, We would have opened to them blessings from the heaven and the earth* (7:96).

The meaning is: "If they—including the jinn and the humans—persevere on the path of submission to God, We will provide them with abundant sustenance in order to try them with respect to their material well-being."

لِنَفْتِنَهُمْ فِيهِ ۚ وَمَنْ يُعْرِضْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ رَبِّهِ يَسْلُكْهُ عَذَابًا صَعَدًا ﴿١٧﴾

(72:17) ***So that We may test them therein, and whoever turns away from the remembrance of his Lord, He will let him*** **(yaslukhu)** ***into an escalating*** **(ṣaʿadan)** ***punishment.***

An escalating punishment is one that rises (*yaṣʿadu*) and prevails over the person. Some have interpreted it as excruciating torment. "Turning away from the remembrance of God" is the main criterion for being let into punishment. That is why it is mentioned in this verse: to clarify the cause of their entrance into hell. Otherwise, it is a necessary implication of "not being steadfast on the path." The two are two sides of the same coin.[1]

The second part of the verse involves a transition from the first person plural to the third person, as it says *the remembrance of his Lord* instead of "Our remembrance." The reason for this transition is because the punishment of those who turn away from God's remembrance relates to His quality of Lordship. That is why the verse explicitly refers to Him as the Lord in order to indicate the agency at work in their punishment. This is similar to describing them as *whoever turns away from the remembrance* instead of those who are not *steadfast on the path* (72:16). The verse's meaning should be clear.

Examining Narrations

(1) Ibn ʿAbbās said: The Messenger of God neither recited [these verses] for the jinn nor saw them. Once he headed for ʿUkāẓ

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1 It is said that *yaslukhu* means *yudkhilhu* (He will make him enter), which is a ditransitive verb. That is why the verb is used with two objects in the verse. (Auth.)

Yasluku means "to tread, to traverse," or "to thread, to weave, to cut." Its object is usually a path, as used in verses 16:69, 20:53, 71:20. However, its usage often implies "taking someone or something to somewhere," as used in the current verse, as well as in verses 15:12, 23:27, 26:200, 28:32, 39:21, 69:32, 72:27, 74:42. (Trans.)

Market with his Companions. That was when the devils [from the jinn] were impeded from receiving the news of the heavens. When they returned to their community, they were asked, "What's up?"

"We have been blocked from the news of the heaven, and there are meteors being fired at us."

"This must be," they concluded, "because of a new incident. So traverse the east and the west of the world [to discover what has happened]."

A group of them that had taken the route of Tihāmah [that is, the Arabian Peninsula] came across the ʿUkāẓ Market when the Prophet was performing the Morning Prayer with his Companions. When they heard the Qur'an, they stopped and gave ear to it. "This is," they murmured, "what has veiled us from the news of the heavens." Thus they returned to their community and said: *Indeed we heard a wonderful recitation, which leads to guidance. Hence we have believed in it and we will never ascribe any partner to our Lord* (72:1-2). So God revealed to His Prophet: *Say: "It is revealed unto me that indeed a company of the Jinn gave ear"* (72:1).[1]

Author's comment: Al-Qummī has also reported a similar account to it in his *Tafsīr*, which we presented under the verse: *When We dispatched toward you a group of jinn…* (46:29). Al-Qummī's account suggests that the verses in Chapter 46 were revealed concerning the same group of jinn as the current chapter. This, however, is incompatible with the apparent verses of the two chapters. There they say: *O our people! Indeed we have heard a Book which has been sent down to Moses, confirming what was before it. It guides to the truth…* (46:30), which suggests that they used to believe in Moses and had accepted the Torah. But the verses in the current chapter state that they were polytheists and denied prophethood altogether. This suggests that they were two different groups, unless one finds evidence to divert the verses from their apparent sense.

(2) ʿAlqamah b. Qays says: I asked ʿAbd-Allāh b. Masʿūd, "Which one of you [Companions] were with the Prophet on the night of

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-Wāḥidī, on the authority of Saʿīd b. Jubayr. This is also reported by al-Bukhārī and Muslim in their *Ṣaḥīḥs*.

the jinn?" He replied:

"None of us was with him. We lost him that night, and we thought, 'He is either abducted or flown off [to the heavens].' We went searching for him in the valleys. Then we saw him approaching us from the direction of Ḥirāʾ.

'O Messenger of God!' we exclaimed, 'where were you? We were very anxious for you. Last night we spent the most terrible night that any community has experienced.'

He replied, 'Someone from the jinn called me over, so I went and recited the Qur'an to them.'

Then he took us with him and showed us their traces and the remainders of their fire. However, none of us accompanied him that night."[1]

(3) It is narrated from Imams al-Bāqir and Imam al-Ṣādiq and al-Rabīʿ b. Anas: God is not characterized by *jadd* (fortune, luck). The jinn said it out of ignorance, and God narrated their speech as they said it [in verse 72:3].[2]

Author's comment: The kind of *jadd* that is not applicable to God is fortune, chance and luck.

(4) Imam ʿAlī said: The Prophet was in Baṭn al-Nakhl when the jinn approached him. They apologized because *They thought, just as you think, that Allah would not raise anyone* (72:7). There were 71,000 of them who met him at that time. They pledged allegiance to the Prophet to observe the prayer, fasting, *zakāt*, hajj, jihad, and sincere well-wishing for the Muslims. They apologized for uttering *atrocious lies concerning Allah* (72:4).[3]

Author's comment: Their allegiance to the Prophet to observe the obligations—like the prayer and fasting—is confirmed by the verses: *Hence we have believed in it* (72:2); *When we heard the [message of] guidance, we believed in it* (72:13). However, we do not know how they would act upon these obligations, particularly *zakāt* and jihad. Also, their first apology [concerning verse 72:7] is not quite clear.

(5) Once Zurārah asked Imam al-Bāqir about the verse: *Indeed some*

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

3 *Al-Iḥtijāj*.

persons from the humans would seek the protection of some persons from the jinn, thus only adding to their rebellion (72:6). The Imam replied: A man would go to a soothsayer—who received inspirations from Satan—and say, "Tell Satan that so-and-so has asked for your protection."[1]

(6) Concerning *So whoever that has faith in his Lord shall neither fear any loss* (bakhsan) *nor oppression* (rahaqan) (72:13) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *Bakhs* means *nuqṣān* (loss, reduction, deficiency), and *rahaq* means punishment.[2]

(7) Once "The Learned One" (al-ʿĀlim)[3] was asked whether the believing jinn would enter paradise. He said: No, but God has some sanctuaries between paradise and hell, where the believers among the jinn and the sinners among our followers (*shīʿah*) will be positioned.[4]

Author's comment: Perhaps what is meant by "sanctuaries" is certain levels of paradise that are lower than the gardens of the righteous. There are some narrations from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt which match guidance and path in these verses with the *wilāyah* (divine guardianship, spiritual authority) of Imam ʿAlī. These are cases of extending the verse to other contexts (called *jary*), not an interpretation for the apparent and primary meaning of the verse (called *tafsīr*).

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1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, via its chain of transmission.

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.

3 This title apparently refers to Imam al-Kāẓim. (Trans.)

4 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.

Verses 18-28

وَ أَنَّ الْمَساجِدَ لِلَّهِ فَلا تَدْعُوا مَعَ اللَّهِ أَحَداً ﴿١٨﴾ وَ أَنَّهُ لَمَّا قامَ عَبْدُ اللَّهِ يَدْعُوهُ
كادُوا يَكُونُونَ عَلَيْهِ لِبَداً ﴿١٩﴾ قُلْ إِنَّما أَدْعُوا رَبِّي وَ لا أُشْرِكُ بِهِ أَحَداً ﴿٢٠﴾ قُلْ إِنِّي
لا أَمْلِكُ لَكُمْ ضَرًّا وَ لا رَشَداً ﴿٢١﴾ قُلْ إِنِّي لَنْ يُجِيرَنِي مِنَ اللَّهِ أَحَدٌ وَ لَنْ أَجِدَ
مِنْ دُونِهِ مُلْتَحَداً ﴿٢٢﴾ إِلاَّ بَلاغاً مِنَ اللَّهِ وَ رِسالاتِهِ وَ مَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَ رَسُولَهُ فَإِنَّ
لَهُ نارَ جَهَنَّمَ خالِدِينَ فِيها أَبَداً ﴿٢٣﴾ حَتَّى إِذا رَأَوْا ما يُوعَدُونَ فَسَيَعْلَمُونَ مَنْ
أَضْعَفُ ناصِراً وَ أَقَلُّ عَدَداً ﴿٢٤﴾ قُلْ إِنْ أَدْرِي أَ قَرِيبٌ ما تُوعَدُونَ أَمْ يَجْعَلُ لَهُ رَبِّي
أَمَداً ﴿٢٥﴾ عالِمُ الْغَيْبِ فَلا يُظْهِرُ عَلى غَيْبِهِ أَحَداً ﴿٢٦﴾ إِلاَّ مَنِ ارْتَضى مِنْ رَسُولٍ
فَإِنَّهُ يَسْلُكُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَ مِنْ خَلْفِهِ رَصَداً ﴿٢٧﴾ لِيَعْلَمَ أَنْ قَدْ أَبْلَغُوا رِسالاتِ
رَبِّهِمْ وَأَحاطَ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ وَأَحْصَىٰ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عَدَدًا ﴿٢٨﴾

(72:18) *And the places of worship belong to Allah, so do not invoke anyone along with Allah.*

(72:19) *When the servant of Allah rose to pray to Him, they almost crowded around him.*

(72:20) *Say, "I pray only to my Lord, and I do not ascribe any partner to Him."*

(72:21) *Say, "I do not possess any harm or guidance for you."*

(72:22) *Say, "Neither can anyone shelter me from Allah, nor can I find any refuge apart from Him.*

(72:23) *[I have no duty] except transmitting from Allah, and His messages; and whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, indeed there will be for him the fire of hell, and they will remain in it forever."*

(72:24) *Until, when they see what they are promised, they will then know who is weaker in supporters and fewer in numbers.*

(72:25) *Say, "I do not know if what you are promised is near, or if my Lord has set a term for it."*

(72:26) *Knower of the unseen, He does not authorize anyone over His unseen,*
(72:27) *except one with whom He is pleased—a messenger. Then He dispatches a sentinel before him and behind him*
(72:28) *so that He may ascertain that they have communicated the messages of their Lord, and He comprehends all that is with them, and He keeps count of all things.*

Introduction & Commentary

These verses confirm prophethood and mention God's oneness and the resurrection as a conclusion to the story of the jinn. They end with discussing the preservation of God's message.

وَأَنَّ الْمَسَاجِدَ لِلَّهِ فَلَا تَدْعُوا مَعَ اللَّهِ أَحَدًا ﴿١٨﴾

(72:18) *And the places of worship* (masājid) *belong to Allah, so do not invoke* (tadʿū, from duʿāʾ) *anyone along with Allah.*

The conjunction "and" connects this verse to the first verse: *that indeed a company of the Jinn gave ear* (72:1). *Duʿāʾ* (supplication, calling, invocation) in this verse means *ʿibādah* (worship, service). This equivalence can clearly be observed in the verse: *Your Lord has said, 'Call Me* (udʿūnī, from duʿāʾ)*, and I will answer you!' Indeed those who are disdainful of My worship* (ʿibādatī) *will enter hell in utter humility'* (40:60). The first half of the verse—*And the places of worship belong to Allah*—is an argument and justification for the conclusion drawn in the second half: *so do not invoke anyone along with Allah*. The implied meaning is: "Do not worship anyone beside God *because* the places of worship belong to Him [exclusively]."

Some suggested interpretations for *the places of worship* are:

(1) The Kaʿbah.

(2) The Holy Mosque.

(3) The Holy Mosque and Bayt al-Maqdis [in Jerusalem].

Comment: The problem with these interpretations is that the plural form of the word *masājid* (places of worship) is incompatible with only one or two places.

(4) The *ḥaram* (the sacred territory of Mecca).

Comment: This is an unwarranted interpretation.

(5) The entire earth, as per the Prophet's narration: "The earth has been made a place of worship and pure for me"

Comment: This hadith is meant to say that it is *permissible* for Muslims to pray anywhere in the world, in contrast to the Jews and Christians who would not pray outside their synagogues and churches. The hadith, however, does not imply that all parts of the earth are called *masjid* in an unqualified manner.

(6) The ritual prayers, since they should be performed only for the sake of God.

Comment: There is no evidence to support this interpretation.

(7) The seven parts of the body that touch the ground in prostration (*sajdah*, *sujūd*), including the forehead, the palms, the knees, and the big toes.

Comment: This is narrated from Imam al-Jawād, and also from Saʿīd b. Jubayr, al-Farrāʾ and al-Zajjāj. We shall present the full account in our examination of narrations below, if God wills.

Based on this tradition, it is most appropriate to interpret the verse as saying that the parts of the body on which one makes prostration belong to God in the sense that they are exclusively assigned to Him in the legal code of the shariah. Furthermore, *duʿāʾ* in this verse refers to prostration specifically, as a clear form of worship. It could also refer to the prayer (*ṣalāh*) more generally, in the sense that it incorporates prostration before God.

The meaning is: "It has also been revealed to me that the members of prostration exclusively belong to God, so only use them to prostrate yourselves before Him alone—or to worship Him alone—not anyone else."

وَأَنَّهُ لَمَّا قَامَ عَبْدُ اللَّهِ يَدْعُوهُ كَادُوا يَكُونُونَ عَلَيْهِ لِبَدًا ﴿١٩﴾

(72:19) ***When the servant of Allah rose to pray to Him, they almost crowded* (libadan)** ***around him.***

Libad is the plural of *lubdah*, meaning "a crowded group." *The servant of Allah* refers to the Prophet, as we can infer from the next verse. This expression serves as a prelude to what follows: *Say, "I pray only to my Lord"* (72:20). The context of the verses suggests that the pronoun "they" refers to the polytheists. It is narrated that they used to gather around the Prophet when he stood to pray and recite the Qur'an. They would deride him and raise their voice above his. The meaning is: "When the Prophet rises to worship God through the prayer, the polytheists would crowd around him as though they are a dense cluster."

Some exegetes have suggested that the plural pronouns in this verse

refer to the jinn. They used to gather and crowd around the Prophet when he prayed. They were amused to see him recite a speech that they had not heard the like of before. Others have suggested that the pronouns refer to the believers. They would gather around the Prophet and follow his lead when he prayed, while remaining silent and listening to his recitation. However, as we explained above, the context of the subsequent verses does not corroborate either of these interpretations in a satisfactory way.

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَدْعُو رَبِّي وَلَا أُشْرِكُ بِهِ أَحَدًا ﴿٢٠﴾

(72:20) ***Say, "I pray only to my Lord, and I do not ascribe any partner to Him."***

Here God orders the Prophet to clarify the nature of his worship to the polytheists in a way that would remove their perplexity. They observed him pray to God in a way that they had not seen in anyone else. It would be natural for them to wonder if that was a plot against their idols or a scheme against themselves for worldly goals.

The effective meaning is: "What I do is not for none of the objectives that you suspect and accuse me of. Rather, I worship my Lord alone, and do not associate anyone with Him. If one recognizes someone to be their Lord, then there should be no surprise or blame if they worship their Lord."

قُلْ إِنِّي لَا أَمْلِكُ لَكُمْ ضَرًّا وَلَا رَشَدًا ﴿٢١﴾

(72:21) ***Say, "I do not possess any harm* (ḍarran)** ***or guidance* (rashadan)** ***for you."***

The context of the verses suggest that the Prophet intends to clarify his relation both to his Lord and to the people. The last verse described the former: *Say, "I pray only to my Lord, and I do not ascribe any partner to Him"* (72:20). This verse explains the latter, saying that the Prophet is a human being like them. He is not in charge of their gain or loss. He can neither harm them if he wills, nor lead them to some benefit that he wishes out of his power. He is charged to convey God's message to them, and he has no choice but to carry out his mission. He can find no protector nor a refuge against God should he choose to violate and disobey His commands. Likewise, the people have no alternative but to obey God and His Messenger. *Whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, indeed there will be for him the fire of hell, and they will remain in it forever* (72:23).

They will realize this when they see what they are promised [on the Day of Resurrection].

Based on the above interpretation, "possessing harm" means having the ability to cause them some harm as he wills. Similarly, "possessing guidance" means the ability to direct benefits to them and not miss the target. The meaning is: "I do not claim to be able to either harm or benefit you." According to some exegetes, *ḍarr* (harm, loss) in this verse implies *ghayy* (error, straying, misguidance), which is the opposite of *rashad* (guidance, growth, right course), where the verse has mentioned the effect and result of *ghayy*.

قُلْ إِنِّي لَنْ يُجِيرَنِي مِنَ اللَّهِ أَحَدٌ وَلَنْ أَجِدَ مِنْ دُونِهِ مُلْتَحَدًا ﴿٢٢﴾ إِلَّا بَلَاغًا مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِسَالَاتِهِ ۚ وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَإِنَّ لَهُ نَارَ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا ﴿٢٣﴾

(72:22-23) ***Say, "Neither can anyone shelter me* (yujīrunī, from ijārah) *from Allah, nor can I find any refuge* (multaḥadan) *apart from Him. [I have no duty] except transmitting* (balāghan) *from* (min) *Allah, and His messages; and whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, indeed there will be for him the fire of hell, and they will remain in it forever."***

Ijārah means "granting refuge and protection to someone." It would require the protector to guard the refugee against anyone who intends to harm them. The root *laḥd* means "inclining to a side, changing direction." Apparently *multaḥad* (refuge) is a locative noun (*ism makān*), meaning a place where one would incline toward in order to safeguard oneself from harm. Some have suggested that it means an entrance. *Apart from Him* serves as a descriptive qualification.[1] The pronoun *Him* refers to God.

The exception in verse 72:23 refers to *refuge* at the end of the previous verse. *Balāgh* is synonymous with *tablīgh* (conveyance, communication, preaching). It is used here with the preposition *min* (from, of), while it should be used with the preposition *ʿan* (about, of). This indicates an omission in the verse. The implied meaning is: "Except for a transmission which is (*kāʾinan*) from God." Some exegetes have opted for no omission in the verse by suggesting that what is meant by *min* here is *ʿan*. Either way, the meaning is: "My task is only to convey the names and attributes of God to you."

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1 That is, *any* refuge that one may seek would be apart from God, and that is why it would be an ineffective refuge. (Trans.)

… and His messages…: There are two suggested interpretations for this clause. (1) It connects to *transmitting*. The meaning would be: "I am only charged with transmitting from God, and with His messages." (2) It connects to Allah, with the preposition *min* implying *ʿan*. The meaning would be: "My duty is only to communicate to you about God and His messages."

Some exegetes have said that the exception in verse 72:23 refers back to the clause *I do not possess* (72:21). The meaning would be: "I do not possess any harm or guidance for you except inasmuch as conveying from God and His messages." The problem with this view is that verse 72:22 would be an independent statement, which would create a gap between the two parts of the exception. That would break their harmony.

The meaning is: "No one can ever provide me with shelter to safeguard me against God. Nor can I ever find a refuge anywhere else. My only resolution is to obey His command by transmitting His communications concerning His names and attributes, and His messages about religious obligations."

… whoever* (man) *disobeys Allah and His Messenger…: The Messenger is mentioned parallel to God because he is only a communicator of God's message. Hence, rejecting him would be rejecting God, and obeying him would be obeying God. The Qur'an says: *Whoever obeys the Messenger certainly obeys Allah* (4:80). Apparently from this part to the end of the verse is the speech of God, not the continuation of the Prophet's words.

… indeed there will be for him the fire of hell, and they will remain in it forever: The verse has used a mix of singular and plural pronouns here, as it says "for him" (*lahu*) and "they will remain" (*khālidīn*). Both pronouns refer to the Arabic particle *man* (whoever), which is linguistically singular, but semantically plural in this verse.

Given the context of the verses, what is meant by "disobedience" here is turning away from God's oneness (*tawḥīd*) specifically, or more generally from His oneness and its implications in terms of the roots and branches of religion. Therefore, the verse's threat pertains to those who reject the religious message altogether. The verse cannot be used to deduce that all sinners will abide in hell forever, as some exegetes have suggested.

حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا رَأَوْا مَا يُوعَدُونَ فَسَيَعْلَمُونَ مَنْ أَضْعَفُ نَاصِرًا وَأَقَلُّ عَدَدًا ﴿٢٤﴾

(72:24) ***Until* (ḥattá), *when they see what they are promised, they will then know who is weaker in supporters and fewer in numbers.***

The speaker in this verse is God, addressing the Prophet. If it were part of what the Prophet was ordered to say—by the imperative, "Say"—then it should have been phrased in the second person: "Until, when *you* see what *you* are promised, *you* will then know…"

The word "until" indicates the termination of a continuous behaviour or trend. Based on what comes after it in the verse, it refers to the polytheists looking down upon the Prophet by viewing his supporters—that is, the believers—as weak. They did not give any weight to him because of the small number of his followers. Hence, the word "until" implies an omission in the verse. The implied meaning is: "They constantly regard your supporters as weak and few in number, *until, when they see what they are promised*…"

… what they are promised…: This refers to hellfire, which was promised in the last verse.

قُلْ إِنْ أَدْرِى أَقَرِيبٌ مَا تُوعَدُونَ أَمْ يَجْعَلُ لَهُ رَبِّى أَمَدًا ﴿٢٥﴾

(72:25) ***Say, "I do not know if what you are promised is near, or if my Lord has set a term*** **(amadan)** ***for it."***

Amad means "the final point where something ends." The verse addresses an implied question (called a prolepsis) which they would naturally ask. Upon hearing God's threat of punishment, one would be stirred to ask, "And when shall that be?" This verse responds: *Say, "I do not know…"*

عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ فَلَا يُظْهِرُ عَلَىٰ غَيْبِهِ أَحَدًا ﴿٢٦﴾

(72:26) ***Knower of the unseen, He does not authorize*** **(yuẓhiru, from iẓhār)** ***anyone*** **(ʿalá)** ***over His unseen,***

When the verb *iẓhār* (to disclose, to reveal, to show) is used with the preposition *ʿalá* (over, on, above) and two objects, it means "helping someone overcome and dominate something." *Knower of the unseen* is a predicate for an omitted subject. The implied meaning is: "He is the Knower of the unseen." This description of God, in the context of the verse, implies that *all* knowledge of the unseen belongs to God *exclusively*. That is why the verse subsequently mentions the word unseen again and ascribes it to Him: *His unseen*. This sense [of universality and exclusiveness] would not be conveyed had the verse used a pronoun instead: "He does not authorize anyone over *it*."

The meaning is: "He is the Knower of everything unseen, with such knowledge that exclusively belongs to Him. Thus he does not let anyone find out about the unseen which belongs to Him alone." This implies a total negation. Some exegetes, however, have insisted that the verse implies a partial negation, meaning: "He does not let anyone find out about all of His unseen." But our view is substantiated by the following verses.[1]

إِلَّا مَنِ ارْتَضَىٰ مِن رَّسُولٍ فَإِنَّهُ يَسْلُكُ مِنۢ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ رَصَدًا ﴿٢٧﴾

(72:27) ***except one with whom He is pleased—a messenger. Then He dispatches a sentinel before him and behind him***

This is an exception for *anyone* in the last verse. *A messenger* is a descriptive addition for the clause ***with whom He is pleased***. This means that God may let His messengers learn about any part of His unseen that He wills. There are other verses which state that the knowledge of the unseen belongs to God exclusively, such as: *With Him are the treasures of the unseen; no one knows them except Him* (6:59); *To Allah belongs the unseen of the heavens and the earth* (11:123, 16:77); *Say, "No one in the heavens or the earth knows the unseen except Allah"* (27:65). The way to combine these verses and the current verse is to say that God's knowledge of the unseen is intrinsic and primary (*bil-aṣālah*), while the knowledge of others would be extrinsic and secondary (*bil-tabaʿ*). That is, they would only know by His teaching.

These verses can be compared to the verses which talk about who seizes the souls upon their death. In one verse, the act is exclusively attributed to God: *Allah takes the souls at the time of their death* (39:42). Elsewhere the Qur'an says: *Say, "You will be taken away by the angel of death, who has been charged with you"* (32:11); *When death approaches anyone of you, Our messengers take him away* (6:61). The solution to this apparent contradiction is that the act of taking the souls is attributable to God *primarily*, but it is also attributable to the angels *secondarily*, since they are intermediaries that operate under the divine command.

… Then He dispatches a sentinel* (raṣadan) *before him and behind him: The antecedent of the pronoun *He* is God, while the pronouns *him*

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1 Total negation means: "No one can learn about any part of the unseen." Partial negation means: "Some people may learn about some parts of the unseen, but they will not learn about all of it." (Trans.)

refers to the Prophet. *Rāṣid* means "a guard or watch over something." *Raṣad* is synonymous with *rāṣid*. It is originally a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund), which makes it equally applicable to the singular and the plural. *Before him* refers to what lies between the messenger and the people to whom he is sent. *Behind him* refers to what lies between the messenger and the source of revelation, which is God. This is based on an image of God's message extending from the Sender down to the final receiver s. The messenger carries the message from the Origin until he conveys it to the intended recipients. The next verse describes the unseen paths through which the message is revealed to the messenger: *so that He may ascertain that they have communicated the messages of their Lord* (72:28).

The meaning is: "God dispatches guardian angels to watch over what is between the messenger and those to whom he is sent, and also over what is between the messenger and the Source of revelation." This is to protect the revelation from any mix or alteration—through addition or reduction—that may be done by the devils, directly or indirectly.

لِيَعْلَمَ أَنْ قَدْ أَبْلَغُوا رِسَالَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَحَاطَ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ وَأَحْصَىٰ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عَدَدًا ﴿٢٨﴾

(72:28) ***so that He may ascertain that they have communicated the messages of their Lord, and He comprehends all that is with them, and He keeps count of all things.***

The subject of the clause, *so that He may ascertain* is God. The antecedent of the pronouns "they" and "their" is the Arabic particle *man* (one with whom) at the beginning of the last verse, in the sense that the particle indicates plurality. The antecedent could also be *a messenger* in the last verse, as a genus [which would represent *all* messengers].[1]

so that He may ascertain…: This refers to God's knowledge in action, which amounts to the external transmission of His message. In this sense, the verse is comparable to the verse: *So Allah shall surely ascertain those who are truthful, and He shall surely ascertain the liars* (29:3). There are many other verses in the Qur'an which talk about God's knowledge in this sense.

This verse justifies why God dispatches a guard before and behind

1 Either way the meaning is the same: "So that God may ascertain that His messengers have communicated His messages." (Trans.)

His messengers. The meaning is: "It is so that the communication of their Lord's message may unfold and come to pass." That is, the purpose is that His messages may reach the people intact, without any alteration or substitution.

Here are some other suggested interpretations for these verses:

(1) *Before him and behind him* (72:27; or before *it* and behind *it*) refer to *His unseen* (72:26). This means that the message sent from the unseen is protected by guards from before and behind it, until it reaches God's messenger.

Comment: This interpretation is not commensurate with the purpose mentioned in the current verse: *so that He may ascertain that they have communicated the messages of their Lord*, as we explained. The justification in this verse implies that the message must remain preserved from the devils all the way until it reaches the people.

(2) The two pronouns *him* [at the last verse] refer to Gabriel, who conveys God's revelations.

Comment: This interpretation suffers from the same problem as the last one. Furthermore, it is undermined by the fact that there is no mention of Gabriel in the previous verses.

(3) The pronoun "he" in *so that He may ascertain* refers to the *messenger* (72:27), while the plural pronouns "they" and "their" in the clause *they have communicated the messages of their Lord* refer to the guardian angels. The meaning is: "The angels carrying the revelation guard and protect the message so that the messenger may know that the angels conveyed God's revelation to him as it issued from Him." Thus the messenger would rest assured that the message he has received is free from any distortion from the devils. The objective is to know that the message he has *received* is intact, and knowing about the angels' *communication* is a means to ascertain that.

Comment: There are two problems with this interpretation. (i) The mention of "messenger" (*rasūl*) in the last verse suggests that "communications" (*risālāt*) in this verse are the messages conveyed by the messenger to the people, not the messages conveyed by the angels of revelation to the messenger. This means that the pronoun "their" in *their Lord* apparently refers to God's messengers, not the angels. (ii) The angels mentioned in these verses are guardian angels (*raṣad*), not emissaries. The function of guardian angels is to protect [the channel of the message], not to convey [the message].

(4) The meaning is: "So that Muḥammad may know for sure that his predecessors communicated the messages of their Lord."

Comment: This is an implausible interpretation with no evidence to support it.

(5) The meaning is: "So that those who reject God's messengers may know that the messengers indeed conveyed the messages of their Lord."

Comment: This is even less likely than the last interpretation.

… and He comprehends all that is with them…: Based on our interpretation above, the antecedent of the pronoun "them" is the messengers. Apparently this statement complements the two stages of the preservation of the message which were mentioned in the last verse. *Before him* refers to the stage of communication between the messenger and the people to whom he is sent. *Behind him* refers to the stage of communication from when the revelation issues from God until it reaches the messenger. The current phrase of discussion—*all that is with them*—refers to the soul of the messenger as a container and preserver of God's revelation. What is meant by comprehension here is God's all-encompassing knowledge. This means that God's revelation is immune from distortion and alteration in all its three stages: (i) between its origin and the messenger; (ii) within the soul of the messenger; and (iii) between the messenger and the people to whom he is sent.

Another possibility is that the clause, *all that is with them* refers to all aspects that pertain to the messengers, including the stages of revelation and communication before and after their soul. This makes the phrase comparable to the last part of the verse—*He keeps count of all things*—which is meant to signify God's universal knowledge of everything by referring to His knowledge of their number and distinctions.

The Four Points Understood from the Preceding Three Verses

We can deduce four points from the last three verses of this chapter:

(1) What exclusively belongs to God is an *intrinsic* and *primary* knowledge of the unseen, as we explained above. He knows the unseen by the virtue of His essence, while others may know it through His teaching . This should clarify that the other verses in the Qur'an which deny anyone else's knowledge of the unseen imply an intrinsic and independent knowledge. That does not contradict knowing about the unseen through God's revelation. Some of these verses are: *Say, "I do not say to you that I possess the treasuries of Allah, nor do I know the Unseen"* (6:50); *Had I*

known the Unseen, I would have acquired much good (7:188); *Say, "I am not a novelty among the messengers, nor do I know what will be done with me, or with you. I just follow whatever is revealed to me"* (46:9).

(2) The verses present a universal rule—*He does not authorize anyone over His unseen* (72:26)—followed by an exception: *except one with whom He is pleased—a messenger* (72:27). Thus there could also be other exceptions to this rule. One example would be the prophets, assuming that the word messenger (*rasūl*) is meant in its specific sense here, in contradistinction with prophet (*nabī*). The fact that God allows His prophets on the unseen can be deduced from the Qur'an based on the following two premises: (i) The Qur'an states that the prophets are revealed to: *We have indeed revealed to you as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him* (4:163). (ii) The Qur'an states that revelation is an instance of the unseen.

It is also possible that the word *messenger* in verse 72:27 is meant in a general sense, including anyone who is sent from God with a mission to the people. This would also include the prophets, as reflected in these verses: *We did not send before you any messenger or prophet* (22:52); *We did not send a prophet to any town* (7:94). In that case, the very exception of a messenger (*rasūl*) in verse 72:27 woul also apply to a prophet (*nabī*), without requiring a further exception.

Another Qur'anic exception to this rule is an *imām* (leader), in its Qur'anic sense. The Qur'an describes the *imāms* as having patience and certitude: *And amongst them We appointed imams to guide [the people] by Our command, when they had been patient and had conviction in Our signs* (32:24). It also says that the veil has been removed from them: *Thus did We show Abraham the dominions of the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those who possess certitude* (6:75); *Nay! Were you to know with knowledge of certainty, you would surely see hell* (102:5-6). We had a discussion on this previously.[1]

The rule mentioned here—*He does not authorize anyone over His unseen* (72:26)—is only applicable to the people of this world, meaning those who are living on the earth. Otherwise, if we consider the dead, then they are certainly not subject to this rule, since they witness the affairs of afterlife, which is part of the unseen as per the explicit text of the Qur'an. This would limit the universal expression of the rule to the point of not

1 See the author's discussion under verses 46:1-14. (Trans.)

being applicable to anyone, because everyone will be resurrected, and *That is a day on which all humankind will be gathered, and it is a day witnessed [by all creatures]* (11:103). The dead are not an exception to the rule mentioned here because their world is different from this world. For the same reason, the angels are no exception either, since their world is different from ours. The revelation that the angels carry, as well as what they observe in the angelic world, are part of the visible realities with respect to them, though they are unseen with respect to us.

(3) The last two verses—*Then He dispatches a sentinel before him and behind him…* (72:27-28)—indicate that the divine revelation is preserved and undistorted from the moment of its origination from the Source of revelation, through its course of descension, until it reaches its intended audience. This includes three stages in the process of revelation:

(i) The first stage of revelation is from its origin to the point of being received by the messenger. The immunity of revelation in this stage is reflected in the phrase *behind him* (72:27).[1]

(ii) The second stage is the messenger. The phrase *so that He may ascertain that they have communicated the messages of their Lord* (72:28) reflects three aspects of the immunity of revelation with respect to the messenger: (a) The messenger receives the message from the angel correctly, in a way that he recognizes it, without making a mistake. (b) The messenger retains the message faithfully, without forgetting or modifying it. (c) The message is conveyed to the people from the messenger intact, without any Satanic manipulation. The aforementioned phrase shows that God's objective in dispatching guardian angels is to ascertain that the messages of their Lord are communicated. What is meant by "ascertain" here is external materialization and fulfillment. The divine revelation must be communicated to the people in actuality, which means that they must receive it. If the messenger lacks any of the three aforementioned immunities, then the divine objective outlined in the verse would not be realized. Now, the only means mentioned in the verse for the achievement of this objective is the dispatch of sentinels. This implies that revelation

1 This is based on the pronoun "him" in *behind him* referring to the messenger. If the pronoun refers to the unseen, then the entire phrase—*before him and behind him* (72:27)—would serve to show its preservation. However, as we said above, this interpretation is weak. (Auth.)

is protected by the angels not only while it is in the process of reaching the messenger, but also after that, when it is in his soul and memory. This preservation is emphasized by the statement: *and He comprehends all that is with them* (72:28).

(iii) The last stage is the communication of the message by the messenger to the people. The immunity of revelation in this stage is reflected in the phrase *before him* (72:27). This stage is also reflected in the phrase *so that He may ascertain that they have communicated the messages of their Lord* (72:28), as we explained.

Therefore, the messengers are immune from error in all three stages of receiving the revelation, preserving it, and communicating it to the people. God sends His religion to the people through revelation to a messenger. The verse states that this process is secure in all its stages of transmission, until it reaches the people. And the messenger is part of this process, where he receives, preserves, and communicates the message to the people.

Moreover, communication of the message is not just verbal, but also practical, for one's actions also convey a message. This necessitates that God's messengers are infallible, meaning that they do not commit any sin, nor neglect any religious obligation. Otherwise, they would be communicating [through their actions] something that is contradictory to their religious message. Accordingly, the messengers are infallible with respect to sins, just as they are infallible in receiving the revelation, preserving it, and communicating it to the people verbally.

As we explained above, prophethood (*nubuwwah*) and messengership (*risālah*) are comparable inasmuch as they involve divine revelation. Hence, a prophet (*nabī*) is also infallible, just like a messenger (*rasūl*). In other words, those who communicate God's revelation—whether they are prophets or messengers—are infallible in receiving the message, preserving it, and conveying it to the people—both verbally and practically.

(4) In verse 72:27, the exception of the messengers as having access to the unseen applies to any element of the unseen that pertains to their communication of the divine message. This includes knowledge of religious doctrines, practical laws, stories, lessons, wisdoms and admonitions. It also includes miraculous signs of their prophetic mission, as narrated from some of the prophets who informed the people about the unseen. One example of this is Prophet Ṣāliḥ, who told his people: *Enjoy yourselves in your homes for three days: that is a promise not to be belied* (11:65). Another example is Prophet Jesus, who told the Children of Israel: A*nd I*

will tell you what you have eaten and what you have stored in your houses. There is indeed a sign in that for you (3:49). The same can be said about the promises, threats and predictions made by God's messengers, as well as future events mentioned in the Qur'an. All of these are elements of unseen that the messengers are authorized over.

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Examining Narrations

(1) Once al-Muʿtaṣim asked Imam al-Jawād concerning the penalty of a robber: "From where should his hand be lopped?" The Imam replied: "It should be cut off from the last joint of the fingers, excluding the palm."
"What is your reason for that?" al-Muʿtaṣim inquired.
The Imam explained: "The Messenger of God said, 'Prostration should be made on seven parts of the body: the face, the two hands, the two knees, and the two feet.' If the hand is cut off from the wrist or the elbow, he will not be left with anything to prostrate on. But God says: *The places of worship* (masājid) *belong to Allah, so do not invoke anyone along with Allah* (72:18), where the *masājid* (lit. places of prostration, or means of prostration) are the seven parts of the body touching the ground in prostration. Any part that belongs to God should not be lopped…"[1]

(2) Once Imam al-Ṣādiq prostrated on eight major parts [of his body]: the two palms, the two knees, the two big toes, the forehead, and the nose. Then he said: Seven of them are obligatory to touch the ground, as God says in His Book: *The places of worship belong to Allah, so do not invoke anyone along with Allah* (72:18). Those are the forehead, the two palms, the two knees, and the two big toes. But it is recommended (*sunnah*) to touch the nose on the ground as well.[2]

(3) Once Imam al-Riḍā looked at Ibn Hadhdhāb and said, "Would you accept if I informed you that you will be afflicted these days by the killing of one of your relatives?"
"No," he replied, "since nobody is aware of the unseen save God."
The Imam said, "Doesn't He says: *Knower of the unseen, He does*

1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ḥammād b. ʿĪsá.

> *not authorize anyone over His unseen, except one with whom He is pleased—a messenger* (72:26-27)? God is pleased with the Messenger of God, and we [Imams] are the inheritors of that messenger whom God authorized over His unseen to the extent that He willed. Thus we know what has happened and what shall happen until the Day of Resurrection."[1]

Author's comment: There are innumerable traditions in this regard. They state that the Prophet has knowledge of the unseen through God's revelation, and the Imams have inherited that knowledge from the Prophet.

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1 *Al-Kharāʾij wa al-jarāʾiḥ*, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Faḍl al-Hāshimī.

Chapter 73

al-Muzzammil (The Wrapped One)

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Verses 1-19

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمُزَّمِّلُ ﴿١﴾ قُمِ اللَّيْلَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٢﴾ نِصْفَهُ أَوِ انْقُصْ مِنْهُ قَلِيلًا ﴿٣﴾ أَوْ زِدْ
عَلَيْهِ وَرَتِّلِ الْقُرْآنَ تَرْتِيلًا ﴿٤﴾ إِنَّا سَنُلْقِي عَلَيْكَ قَوْلًا ثَقِيلًا ﴿٥﴾ إِنَّ نَاشِئَةَ اللَّيْلِ
هِيَ أَشَدُّ وَطْئًا وَأَقْوَمُ قِيلًا ﴿٦﴾ إِنَّ لَكَ فِي النَّهَارِ سَبْحًا طَوِيلًا ﴿٧﴾ وَاذْكُرِ اسْمَ
رَبِّكَ وَتَبَتَّلْ إِلَيْهِ تَبْتِيلًا ﴿٨﴾ رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَاتَّخِذْهُ وَكِيلًا
﴿٩﴾ وَاصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ وَاهْجُرْهُمْ هَجْرًا جَمِيلًا ﴿١٠﴾ وَذَرْنِي وَالْمُكَذِّبِينَ أُولِي
النَّعْمَةِ وَمَهِّلْهُمْ قَلِيلًا ﴿١١﴾ إِنَّ لَدَيْنَا أَنْكَالًا وَجَحِيمًا ﴿١٢﴾ وَطَعَامًا ذَا غُصَّةٍ وَعَذَابًا
أَلِيمًا ﴿١٣﴾ يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الْأَرْضُ وَالْجِبَالُ وَكَانَتِ الْجِبَالُ كَثِيبًا مَهِيلًا ﴿١٤﴾ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا
إِلَيْكُمْ رَسُولًا شَاهِدًا عَلَيْكُمْ كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ رَسُولًا ﴿١٥﴾ فَعَصَىٰ فِرْعَوْنُ
الرَّسُولَ فَأَخَذْنَاهُ أَخْذًا وَبِيلًا ﴿١٦﴾ فَكَيْفَ تَتَّقُونَ إِنْ كَفَرْتُمْ يَوْمًا يَجْعَلُ الْوِلْدَانَ
شِيبًا ﴿١٧﴾ السَّمَاءُ مُنْفَطِرٌ بِهِ ۚ كَانَ وَعْدُهُ مَفْعُولًا ﴿١٨﴾ إِنَّ هَٰذِهِ تَذْكِرَةٌ ۖ فَمَنْ شَاءَ
اتَّخَذَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ سَبِيلًا ﴿١٩﴾

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

(73:1) *O you wrapped up in your raiment!*
(73:2) *Stand vigil through the night, except a little,*
(73:3) *A half of it, or reduce a little from that*
(73:4) *Or add to it, and recite the Qur'an in measure.*
(73:5) *Indeed soon We shall cast on you a weighty word.*
(73:6) *Indeed the event of the night is firmer in stability and more*

upright in respect to speech,

(73:7) *for indeed during the day you have a drawn-out immersion*

(73:8) *So remember the name of your Lord and devote yourself to Him with a complete devotion.*

(73:9) *Lord of the east and the west, there is no god except Him, so take Him for your trustee.*

(73:10) *And be patient over what they say, and keep away from them in a graceful manner.*

(73:11) *And leave Me [to deal] with the deniers, the opulent, and give them a little respite.*

(73:12) *Indeed with Us are heavy fetters and a fierce fire,*

(73:13) *and a food that chokes [those who gulp it], and a painful punishment [prepared for].*

(73:14) *On the day when the earth and the mountains will quake, and the mountains will be like dunes of running sand.*

(73:15) *Indeed We have sent to you a messenger, to be a witness to you, just as We sent a messenger to Pharaoh.*

(73:16) *But Pharaoh disobeyed the messenger; so We seized him with a terrible seizing.*

(73:17) *So, if you disbelieve, how will you avoid the day which will make children white-headed?*

(73:18) *The heaven will be rent asunder thereby. His promise is bound to be fulfilled.*

(73:19) *This is indeed a reminder. So let anyone who wills take a way toward his Lord.*

Introduction & Commentary

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 20 verses. The sūrah orders to Prophet to perform the night prayer in order to prepare himself for receiving the weighty speech—the Qur'an—which is revealed to him. It also commands him to be patient with what the people say—that he is a poet, a soothsayer, a lunatic and so on. He is instructed to retire from them gracefully. The chapter also includes some threat and warning to the disbelievers. The initial instructions to the Prophet are extended to the rest of the believers, but they are reduced in the last verse. This sūrah was one of the very first chapters revealed to the Prophet in Mecca, called *al-ʿatāʾiq* (the ancient ones). It is said that it was the second or the third sūrah that was revealed to the Prophet.

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمُزَّمِّلُ ﴿١﴾

(73:1) *O you wrapped up in your raiment* (al-muzzammil)*!*

The Prophet had wrapped himself in a garment to sleep when this chapter was revealed to him, calling him *al-muzzammil*.[1] This address, in and of itself, does not imply either reproach or praise, unlike what some exegetes have thought. We can deduce from the following verses that the Prophet's call had been faced with derogation, derision and abuse. Thus he had wrapped up himself in a robe to sleep, as a means of overcoming his gloominess. Then this chapter called out to him, *O you wrapped up in your raiment*, and ordered him to observe the night vigil, to perform the prayer, and to be patient with what they say. These instructions are comparable to what the Qur'an says in the verse: *Take recourse in patience and prayer* (2:45, 2:153). He was ordered to cope with his major hardships and great sorrows by the means of prayer and patience, not by the means of wrapping up himself in a garment and sleeping.

Some exegetes have suggested an alternative meaning for the verse: "O you who is wrapped up by the raiment of prophethood, meaning the heavy burden of its responsibilities." However, there is no textual evidence for this interpretation.

قُمِ اللَّيْلَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٢﴾

(73:2) *Stand vigil through the night, except a little.*

The imperative verb "stand" (*qum*) has a transitive meaning here, and its object is "prayer" which is replaced and represented by "night."[2] This is similar to saying, "I entered the house" [where the preposition "in" is implied]. According to some exegetes, the imperative is intransitive, and the implied meaning is: "Stand up to pray at night." *Except a little* introduces an exception to the night.

نِصْفَهُ أَوِ انْقُصْ مِنْهُ قَلِيلًا ﴿٣﴾ أَوْ زِدْ عَلَيْهِ وَرَتِّلِ الْقُرْآنَ تَرْتِيلًا ﴿٤﴾

1 *Muzzammil* is an *ism al-fāʿil* (nominative substantive, active participial noun) derived from the verb *tazammul*, which means "wrapping oneself in a garment" for sleep or the like. (Auth.)

2 The meaning would be: "Establish the prayer at night," or "Establish the night prayer." (Trans.)

(73:3-4) ***A half of it, or reduce a little from that, or add to it, and recite the Qur'an in measure.***

The meaning is: "Keep vigil half of the night, or reduce from half of it a little, or add to half of it a little." Stating these as three equal alternatives means that the Prophet has the choice to stand either half of the night, or slightly less, or a little more.[1]

Here are two other suggested meanings:

(1) "Keep vigil at night, except for half of it, or except for a bit less than a half—which means you would stand a little more than a half—or except for a bit more than a half—which means you would stand slightly less than a half."[2]

Comment: The effective meaning of this interpretation and ours is the same. The difference is that in this interpretation, the apposition primarily clarifies the exception, and indirectly explains the main command. In our preferred interpretation, the apposition primarily clarifies the main command, and indirectly explains its exception. The latter springs to the mind more readily. What needs clarification, first and foremost, is the object of a command, not its implications and adjuncts.

(2) "Keep vigil either half of the night, or slightly less than that, or a bit more—except for a few nights when you have some excuse due to illness or being overtaken by sleep."[3]

Comment: This interpretation is sound, but the first one comes to mind more quickly.

***… and recite the Qur'an in measure* (tartīlan):** *Tartīl* is "to recite the Qur'an in a manner that its letters are uttered successively and clearly." The conjunction "and" shows that this is a second command parallel to *Stand vigil through the night* (73:2). The meaning is: "Stand vigil through

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1 The context implies that these two verses are a *badal* (apposition, replacement, interpretation) for *the night, except a little* (73:2). They define the boundaries of the command to *Stand vigil* (73:2). The pronouns "that" and it—in *from that* and *to it*—refer to *A half of it*, where the pronoun "it" refers to the night. (Auth.)

2 In this case, the verses are a *badal* for the exception *a little* at the end of the last verse. (Auth.)

3 In this case, the verses are a *badal* for *the night* (73:2), but what is meant is all nights overall, not the parts of each night. (Auth.)

the night, and recite the Qur'an through *tartīl*."

Apparently this verse refers to the recitation of the Qur'an in the ritual prayer (*ṣalāh*), or perhaps to the ritual prayer itself. This can be confirmed by another verse which mentions the Qur'an (lit. recital) when referring to the prayer: *Maintain the prayer from the sun's decline till the darkness of the night, and [observe particularly] the dawn recital. Indeed the dawn recital is attended* (17:78). Some exegetes have maintained that the verse's obligation does not pertains to the prayer, but to the recitation of the Qur'an [independently and outside the prayer].

إِنَّا سَنُلْقِي عَلَيْكَ قَوْلًا ثَقِيلًا ۝٥

(73:5) *Indeed soon We shall cast on you a weighty word.*

"Weight" (*thiql*) is primarily a physical property for objects that are difficult to hold and transport from one place to another. It is also used metaphorically for non-physical things that one cannot handle easily, if at all. A speech can be weighty in either of two ways: (1) It involves certain meanings that are difficult or impossible to comprehend. For instance, technical scientific discussions cannot be easily received by a general audience. (2) It instructs one to certain qualities that are hard to realize in oneself, and to certain practices that are difficult to observe consistently.

The Qur'an, as the word of God, is weighty in both terms: (1) In terms of meaning, it is a divine speech that has issued from the realm of majesty and glory. It cannot be received except by a soul that is purified from every defilement, and is detached from every force and source except God. It is a mighty book with an apparent facet and an inner layer, a revealed text and an underlying reality. It is *a clarification of all things* (16:89). The weightiness of the Qur'an was observable in the Prophet's condition: according to *mustafiḍah* (multiple, diffused, numerous) narrations, he was often overtaken by a semi-coma called *buraḥāʾ al-waḥy* (intensity of revelation) when receiving revelation. (2) In terms of spiritual transformation, the Qur'an directs one to realize the truth of the absolute oneness of God and other principles that come as its implications and corollaries. In this regard, it suffices us to cite these verses: *Had We sent down this Qur'an upon a mountain, you would have surely seen it humbled [and] go to pieces with the fear of Allah. We draw such comparisons for humankind, so that they may reflect* (59:21); *If there could be a recitation whereby the mountains could be moved, or the earth could be toured, or the dead could*

be spoken to [it would have been this Qur'an] (13:31).

The Qur'an is also weighty in the sense that it commands the Prophet to propagate the message, to establish the rites of a purely monotheistic religion, and to make this religion superior to all other paths. This sense of the Qur'an's weight can be observed in the hardships suffered by the Prophet in the way of God, and the pains he had to bear for His sake. The Qur'an attests to this where it speaks about the abuse, derision and treason that he met from the polytheists, the disbelievers, the hypocrites, and those whose hearts were diseased.

We can thus conclude that *a weighty word* in this verse is the Glorious Qur'an. This is what springs to the mind given the context of the verses, which were revealed at the outset of the Prophet's mission. This is how the exegetes have predominantly interpreted the verse.

This verse is stated as a justification for the injunction: *Stand vigil through the night…* (73:2), which was specifically addressed to the Prophet. Given this context, it follows that the Prophet was given these instructions—to observe the night vigil, and to turn his attention to God by means of the night prayers—so that he may be prepared to be blessed with more proximity to God, to advance to a higher level of presence, and to receive a weighty revelation. In other words, the night prayer is a path that leads to such an exalted station. Furthermore, God has described the night prayer as a path to Himself: *This is indeed a reminder. So let anyone who wills take a way toward his Lord* (73:19, 76:29). In addition to the promise mentioned in this verse, He says elsewhere: *And keep vigil for a part of the night, as a supererogatory [devotion] for you. It may be that your Lord will raise you to a praiseworthy station* (17:79). We explained the meaning of *a praiseworthy station* in our exegesis of the verse.[1]

As mentioned above, the Qur'an is weighty in terms of what it takes to realize its teachings and act upon its laws and injunctions. In this sense, it is weighty both for the Muslim ummah (nation, community, people) and for the Prophet. The verse's meaning is: "We shall reveal to you a speech which will be weighty on you and your nation." It is weighty for the Prophet because its realities are difficult to realize in oneself; and also because of the hardships involved in its propagation. He will have to endure many troubles in God's way, will lose his peace and comfort, will

1 See volume 25, p. 239 of the English translation. (Trans.)

have to oppose his personal interests, and will have to cut off from everyone and everything but God. Moreoever, it is weighty for him to receive and absorb it from the Source of revelation. Likewise, it is weighty for his ummah because they share the same burden as the Prophet with respect to realizing its truths, following its commands and prohibitions, and observing its limits. It is weighty for each person according to one's capacity.

Here are some other interpretations of the weightiness of the Qur'an, as suggested by the exegetes:

(1) It is weighty in the sense that it contains a solid, robust and consistent message. When a speech is mentioned as it should, they say, "There is weight to this speech."

(2) It is weighty in one's balance on the Day of Resurrection—either literally, or metaphorically referring to the abundant reward accruing to it.

(3) It is heavy on the disbelievers and hypocrites due to its miracles, and due to its threats [of punishment].

(4) It is weighty in the sense that it remains and persists over the ages. This is based on the notion that a heavy object tends to remain stable in its place.

There is more to add to this list. These views are sound in their own right, but our suggested interpretation is the most apparent meaning that first springs to mind.

إِنَّ نَاشِئَةَ اللَّيْلِ هِيَ أَشَدُّ وَطْئًا وَأَقْوَمُ قِيلًا ﴿٦﴾

(73:6) ***Indeed the event*** **(nāshiʾat)** ***of the night is firmer in stability*** **(waṭʾan)** ***and more upright in respect to speech,***

The last verse—*Indeed soon We shall cast on you a weighty word* (73:5)—was a justification for why the night prayer has been legislated. This verse explains why the night time is chosen for it. The next verse justifies why the day is not chosen.

What is meant *nāshiʾah* here is simply "the night."[1] The night, like

1 There are two possible interpretations for *nāshiʾah*: (1) It is a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund), similar to *ʿāfiyah* (well-being) and *ʿāqibah* (ending). In that case, it would be synonymous with *nashʾah*, meaning "creation, origination, being." (2) It is an *ism al-fāʿil* (nominative substantive, active participial noun) that is annexed to its adjective. (Auth.)

any other part of the creation, can be called an event or creation. Some have suggested that it means "prayer at night." *More upright in respect to speech* means that one's speech at night tends to be more accurate and reliable since there is more presence of the heart, and external noises have subsided. The word *waṭʾ* is used when one places one's foot on the ground. The night time is firmer in stability in the sense that one is more grounded at night since the mind is clear and free from daily engagements. Another suggested meaning is that one's tongue tends to be in a greater coordination, compatibility and conformity with one's heart at the night. The exegetes have corroborated this with an alternative recitation of the verse as *wiṭʾan* (harmonious, consistent, uniform).

The meaning is: "At the event of the night—or when praying at night: (i) one tends to be more steadfast—or one's heart and tongue tend to be more harmonious; (ii) one's speech tends to be more accurate and robust." This is because God has made the night a period of peace following the end of daily engagements, where one can have some free time to oneself.

إِنَّ لَكَ فِي النَّهَارِ سَبْحًا طَوِيلًا ﴿٧﴾

(73:7) ***for indeed during the day you have a drawn-out immersion* (sabḥan).**

Sabḥ means "swimming fast in water." The verse literally says, "a long swim," which is a metaphor for total immersion in daily affairs and the requirements of life. The meaning is: "During the day you have many engagements to attend to. They completely keep you busy, and do not give you any leisure to completely turn your attention to your Lord. You cannot detach yourself from other occupations and free yourself for God's remembrance during the day. Hence, you must use the night and pray at that time."

In the second case, the meaning would be "that which arises at night" or "the nocturnal event."

Based on the author's interpretation, the word *nāshiʾah* can be omitted from the verse without any loss of meaning. Two other possible interpretations for the term are: (i) "The vigil of the night," meaning one's rising up at night, suggested by Pickthall; (ii) "the early watches of the night," inferred from Arberry. Both of these are based on the root meaning of *n-sh-ʾ*, which signifies the onset of something. (Trans.)

Two other suggested interpretations are:

(1) "You have enough time during the day to sleep, to manage your life, and to take care of your needs. Hence, be assiduous in worship at night."

(2) "In case you miss any worship at night, you have the day to compensate for it and make it up." This makes the verse comparable to the verse: *It is He who made the night and the day alternate for one who desires to remember, or desires to give thanks* (25:62).

Comment: Our suggested interpretation fits the context better.

وَاذْكُرِ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ وَتَبَتَّلْ إِلَيْهِ تَبْتِيلًا ﴿٨﴾

(73:8) ***So remember the name of your Lord and devote yourself to Him with a complete devotion.***

This verse describes the night prayer. Therefore, the conjunction *wāw* (lit. "and"; translated "so") at the beginning of the verse makes the verse a continuation of: *and recite the Qur'an in measure* (73:4). In the light of this, the *dhikr* (remembrance, invocation) of God's name implies a verbal remembrance that is accompanied by the remembrance of the heart. Similarly, *devotion* is meant in a verbal sense [that is, humble entreaty and concentrated supplication].

Some exegetes have said that this verse generalizes the specific command in the preceding verses. It means: "Remember God at all times during the night and the day in any way possible, through *tasbīḥ* (glorification), *taḥmīd* (praise), prayer, recitation of the Qur'an, and so on." The verse implies *constant* remembrance because the Prophet would certainly not forget God altogether, so a generic command to remembrance is not applicable to him. Also, constant remembrance is meant in its conventional sense, not literally, because the latter is not practically feasible.

Comment: If what is meant in this interpretation is verbal remembrance and invocation, then there is no problem in commanding the Prophet to remember his Lord verbally even though his heart is mindful of Him.[1] If what is meant is a more general sense of remembrance which also includes the remembrance of the heart, then that is unacceptable.[2]

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1 In other words, one does not need to interpret it as *constant* remembrance. (Trans.)

2 It is unfounded because the verse is mentioned parallel to: *and recite the Qur'an*

Even if we allow this sense of remembrance, there remain two further problems with the above view. (1) Even though the Prophet had been mindful of his Lord up to that point, he could be commanded to continue to remember Him in the future. (2) The interpretation assumes that persistent remembrance of God in a literal sense is impossible, and has thus opted for a conventional and common sense of persistence. This is a misunderstanding, based on missing the reality of remembrance. The fact is that God is in fact remembered by everyone, and is never absent from anyone even for a moment, whether one is attentive to it or inadvertent. Therefore, God may make Himself known to someone in a way the person would always be mindful of Him, as He says: *those who are near your Lord glorify Him night and day, and they are not wearied* (41:38); *They glorify [Him] night and day, and they do not flag* (21:20). We explained in our exegesis of these verses, and also in our exegesis of the last verse of Sūrah al-Aʿrāf, that this quality is not limited to the angels.[1]

In short, *remember the name of your Lord* is an order to invoke any of the divine names, or the name Allah in particular. Some have said that it means invoking "In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful" (*bism Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*).

In the previous verses, God was the speaker in the first person plural: *Indeed soon We shall…* (73:5), but in this verse He is mentioned in the third person: *your Lord*. Perhaps the reason for this transition is to describe God as the Lord in order to remind the audience of their absolute insignificance as His servants, which is their connecting link to their Lord.

***… and devote* (tabattal) *yourself to Him with a complete devotion* (tabtīlan):** *Tabattul* is interpreted as "cutting off from everything else and connecting to God." According to some narrations from the Ahl al-Bayt, *tabattul* means raising the hands toward God and entreating Him with humility. This is more consistent with the interpretation of *dhikr* in the verse as verbal remembrance, as we explained. The last word of the verse is apparently an absolute object (*mafʿūl muṭlaq*) of the verb *tabattul*.[2] If so,

in measure (73:4). (Trans.)

1 See volume 16, p. 306, and volume 28, pp. 34-35 of the English translation. (Trans.)

2 An absolute object would serve to emphasize the verb or clarify its type. (Trans.)

it should have been *tabattulan* instead of *tabtīlan*. There are two suggested explanations for this switch: (1) The verb *tabattul* also implies the meaning of *tabtīl*.[1] The meaning would be: "Detach yourself from anything other than Him through such a detachment," or "Adopt this practice of raising your hands and entreating with such an adoption." (2) The word *tabtīlan* is used to preserve the rhyme of the final words of the surrounding verses.

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رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَاتَّخِذْهُ وَكِيلًا ﴿٩﴾

(73:9) ***Lord of the east and the west, there is no god except Him, so take Him for your trustee.***

The first part of this verse is a description of God, where the subject is omitted. The implied meaning is: "*He is* the Lord of the east and the west." What is meant here is that He is the Lord of the entire universe, since east and west are two relative directions that embrace all directions of the visible world. These two directions are named specifically in accordance with the previous mention of the night and the day, which are related to sunrise and sunset.

In the last verse God was described as *your Lord* (73:8), but here He is described as the Lord of everyone. This is because it does not suffice for one to have a private god for oneself, but one must subscribe to a lord whose lordship covers the entire universe. Sometimes idol-worshipers had an individual idol for each person, different from the idols of others. If the Prophet were to also adopt a lord in this manner—or if this were a conceivable possibility about his Lord—then it would contradict his message of monotheism.

Moreover, God is described as the *Lord of the east and the west*—which implies the Lord of the entire world—in order to prepare the ground for the next part of the verse: *there is no god except Him*. In other words, the first part of the verse about God being the sole Lord of the entire universe (called *rubūbiyyah*) justifies why He is the sole object of worship (called *ulūhiyyah*). The latter is an implication and corollary of the former. As

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1 *Tabattul* (following the verbal pattern *tafaʿʿul*) means "voluntarily assuming or deliberately adopting the act of detachment." *Tabtīl* (following the verbal pattern *tafʿīl*) means "extensive detachment, gradual severance, or abundant entreaty." For all practical purposes in this context, the two are interchangeable and very close in meaning. (Trans.)

we have repeatedly explained, God's Lordship means His sovereignty over all beings, and His direction of all their affairs. Since He is the only Lord and there is no lord but Him, thus He is the only object of worship, and there is no object of worship but Him.

***… so take Him for your trustee* (wakīlan):** Taking someone as a *wakīl* (trustee, guardian, agent) means delegating one's affairs to the person and setting that person instead of oneself, such that one's preferences and actions are substituted by the preferences and actions of the trustee. Taking God as trustee means seeing all affairs as belonging to God and ending in Him. This is applicable in two ways:

(1) With respect to the external events in the universe, one should not consider oneself or anything else to be an independent cause in the world. There is no real cause in the universe—in the sense of bringing any event into *existence*—except for God. This kind of trust and reliance on God entails that one should not be attached to any of the apparent means and forces in the world. One's satisfaction, dissatisfaction, happiness and sorrow must be detached from everything else. Instead, one should seek one's objectives through the means that God has made known, without relying on them as independent sources that can bring anything into effect. One must defer the achievement of goals to God, letting Him decide for His servant as He pleases.

(2) With respect to the religious obligations, including individual rituals and social interactions, one must subject one's choice to the legislative decree of their Lord. That is, one should act according to what God has requested from them through His legislations.

The first aspect of the clause, *so take Him for your trustee* relates to the commands in the next two verses: *And be patient… and keep away from them… And leave Me…* (73:10-11). And its second aspect relates to the legislative injunctions in the previous verses, such as: *So remember the name of your Lord…* (73:8).

وَاصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ وَاهْجُرْهُمْ هَجْرًا جَمِيلًا ﴿١٠﴾

(73:10) *And be patient over what they say, and keep away from them in a graceful manner.*

This verse and the next one start by the conjunction "and," which makes them a continuation of the clause, *so take Him for your trustee* (73:9). The meaning is: "You must rely on your Lord, and a necessary

implication of this reliance is to bear their abusive and pejorative comments about you." This pertains to their false accusations of the Prophet, as having fabricated a lie against God, having brought the myths of the ancients, and being a soothsayer, a poet or a lunatic, as narrated in the Qur'an.[1]

… and keep away from them in a graceful manner: Given the verse's context, this means that the Prophet should deal with the polytheists with good manners and gentle etiquettes, should call them to the truth with sincerity, and should not retaliate to their statements in like manner. We should disregard the suggested view that the verse was abrogated with the verses of jihad, because the two set of verses stand in no contradiction to one another.

وَذَرْنِي وَالْمُكَذِّبِينَ أُولِي النَّعْمَةِ وَمَهِّلْهُمْ قَلِيلًا ﴿١١﴾

(73:11) ***And leave Me*** **[to deal]** ***with the deniers, the opulent, and give them a little respite.***

This verse is a warning to the disbelievers. When one says, "Leave me and so-and-so" (using the verbs *daʿnī* or *dharnī*), it means: "Do not hold me back from him, but let me make them pay." *The deniers, the opulent* are the disbelievers mentioned in the preceding verse, or their chiefs in particular. The two qualities used to describe them here serve as a justification for their threat. Denying God's message while being endowed with His bounties amounts to ungratefulness. And the consequence of ingratitude is being deprived of those pleasures, and having them turned into pain.

… and give them a little respite: This means the short time of their lifespan on the earth, until they return to their Lord to reckon their deeds and punish them accordingly. God says: *Indeed they see it to be far off, and We see it to be near* (70:6-7); *It is a trivial enjoyment; then their refuge is hell, and it is an evil resting place* (3:197).

This verse is seemingly general in application. Some exegetes have said that the verse's warning alludes to the Battle of Badr, but this meaning is not apparent from the verse. While God was referred to in the third person singular in the previous verses, *your Lord* (73:8), He is referred to in the first person singular in this verse: *leave Me*. This transition serves to emphasize and intensify the verse's threat, since it is directly attributed

1 See verses 6:25, 8:31, 15:6, 25:5, 34:8, 37:36, 52:29, 68:15, 68:51, 69:41-42, 83:13. (Trans.)

to God. The next verse then shifts to the first person plural: *Indeed with Us are* (73:12), which indicates glory and majesty.[1]

إِنَّ لَدَيْنَا أَنْكَالًا وَجَحِيمًا ﴿١٢﴾

(73:12) ***Indeed with Us are heavy fetters*** **(ankālan)** ***and a fierce fire*** **(jaḥīman),**

This verse explains and justifies the command in the last verse: *And leave Me…* (73:11). *Ankāl* is synonymous with *quyūd* (fetters, shackles, chains). Al-Rāghib says:

> When the verb *nakala* is used with the preposition *ʿan*, it means that one is incapable of doing something. When one restrains someone with fetters, one says: *nakkaltuhu*. *Nikl* is a rope wherewith an animal's foot is tied, or the metal bit of a bridle, as both serve as barriers for the animal.
>
> *Jaḥīm* is derived from *juḥmah*, which means the intensity of a blazing fire.

وَطَعَامًا ذَا غُصَّةٍ وَعَذَابًا أَلِيمًا ﴿١٣﴾

(73:13) ***and a food that chokes [those who gulp it]*** **(ghuṣṣah),** ***and a painful punishment [prepared for].***

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> The word *ghuṣṣah* is used when some food is stuck in the throat and one cannot swallow it with ease and pleasure. It is used as *ghaṣṣa yaghuṣṣu, ghaṣaṣan*. Similarly, it is used when one chokes on one's saliva. When applied to the heart, *ghuṣṣah* means a sting [of emotional pain and distress] which prevents one from enjoying food or drink.

This verse and the last one describe God's torments in the hereafter, which will replace their enjoyments in this world due to their ungratefulness to God's bounties.

يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الْأَرْضُ وَالْجِبَالُ وَكَانَتِ الْجِبَالُ كَثِيبًا مَهِيلًا ﴿١٤﴾

(73:14) ***On the day when the earth and the mountains will quake*** **(tarjufu, from rajf),** ***and the mountains will be like dunes of running***

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1 This is called the royal "we" or the majestic plural. (Trans.)

(mahīlan) ***sand*** **(kathīban).**

This verse identifies the time of the promised punishments in the preceding two verses. According to al-Rāghib, *rajf* means "severe shaking," and the verb *rajafat* is used when the earth or the sea is turbulent. *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says:

> *Kathīb* means an abundant heap of sand. When the bottom of something is moved such that it causes its top to tumble, that thing becomes *mahīl*. It is used as *hiltuhu ahīluhu haylan*.

The verse's meaning should be clear.

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ رَسُولًا شَاهِدًا عَلَيْكُمْ كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ رَسُولًا ﴿١٥﴾

(73:15) ***Indeed We have sent to you a messenger, to be a witness to you, just as We sent a messenger to Pharaoh.***

The previous verses warned the opulent deniers [73:11] in general about their punishment in the hereafter. This verse specifically warns the opulent deniers among the Prophet's audience by comparing their condition to Pharaoh's. Pharaoh was defiant against God and His messenger. He disparaged Moses and the Israelites who had believed in him. Then the next verse awakens the audience by pointing out how Pharaoh met his end: God seized him fiercely. Hence, the audience must take a lesson and be most cautious.

This verse includes a rhetorical transition from the third person to the second person. In the preceding verse, the disbelievers were warned in the third person. It is as though the Speaker [that is, God] is aroused by the notion of how the deniers ignorantly cast themselves into eternal damnation, so He switches gears to address them directly. This would remove all doubt and ambiguity from them, and would complete the argument against them, so that they may refrain. That is why God first compares them to Pharaoh, then compares the Prophet to Moses, and then describes the fate of Pharaoh. Finally He concludes: *So, if you disbelieve, how will you avoid the day…* (73:17).

Indeed We have sent to you a messenger, to be a witness to you…: This is divine attestation to the mission of the Prophet. It also says that the Prophet witnesses the actions of his people in this world, and will testify to it in the hereafter. Reference to the Prophet's testimony implies a warning against disobeying and rejecting him. We discussed the meaning of

witnessing actions repeatedly under other similar verses.[1]

… just as We sent a messenger to Pharaoh: This refers to Prophet Moses, son of Amram (ʿImrān).

فَعَصَىٰ فِرْعَوْنُ الرَّسُولَ فَأَخَذْنَاهُ أَخْذًا وَبِيلًا ﴿١٦﴾

(73:16) ***But Pharaoh disobeyed the messenger; so We seized him with a terrible*** **(wabīlan)** ***seizing.***

Wabīl means "intense, heavy." This verse describes the consequence of Pharaoh's disobedience to Moses. The verse refers to Moses as *the messenger* in order to show the cause of Pharaoh's punishment: he was seized not because of disobeying Moses as an ordinary person, but because of disobeying him in his mission as God's messenger. Accordingly, these disbelievers should beware of disobeying the message of Muḥammad, because the same logic applies to them equally.

Although Pharaoh's name was already introduced in the last verse, this verse refers to him again with his name instead of a pronoun. This is meant to highlight that the very Pharaoh—despite his glory, power, large army, vast kingdom, and unchallenged authority—could not find anything to defend himself against God's punishment. So what chance do these deniers have? God says: *[They are but] a routed host out there, from among the factions* (38:11).

فَكَيْفَ تَتَّقُونَ إِنْ كَفَرْتُمْ يَوْمًا يَجْعَلُ الْوِلْدَانَ شِيبًا ﴿١٧﴾

(73:17) ***So, if you disbelieve, how will you avoid*** **(tattaqūna)** ***the day which will make children white-headed?***

Linguistically speaking, *the day* is the object of the verb *tattaqūna* (avoid, ward off, self-protect, regard). This is a metaphorical usage, where *the day* alludes to the real object of the verb, which is the promised punishment.[2] There are two other explanations that the exegetes have offered here: (1) *The day* identifies the time for the object of *tattaqūna*, which is omitted. The implied meaning is: "How will you avoid the punishment which will occur on the day…?" (2) *The day* identifies the time for for the

1 See volume 2, pp. 153ff of the English translation, under verse 2:143. The author has also discussed this under verse 16:89. (Trans.)

2 The meaning is: "Wow will you avoid the punishment which will make…" (Trans.)

act of avoidance, and the object of *tattaqūna* is omitted.[1]

… which will make children white-headed* (shīban)*?: *Shīb* is the plural of *ashyab* (old person), which is an antonym of *shābb* (youth, young person). The verse's expression alludes to the severity of the day, not to its duration.

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السَّمَاءُ مُنْفَطِرٌ بِهِۦ ۚ كَانَ وَعْدُهُۥ مَفْعُولًا ﴿١٨﴾

(73:18) ***The heaven will be rent asunder* (munfaṭir, from infiṭār)** ***thereby* (bihi). *His promise is bound to be fulfilled.***

This verse presents another expression for the hardship of that day. *Infiṭār* is synonymous with *inshiqāq* (splitting, cleaving, fracture). The adjective *munfaṭir* is masculine because the word *samāʾ* (heaven, sky) can be modified by both genders. The preposition *bihi* (by it, thereby) refers to *the day* in the last verse. There are two possible interpretations for the letter *bāʾ* (lit. by, with) here: (1) It means *fī* (in). (2) It denotes causality. The meaning is: "The heaven will be cleaved asunder *in* that day—or *because* of that day." In the second case, what is meant is "because of the *severity* of the day."

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… His promise is bound to be fulfilled: This is an independent statement which establishes the inevitability of the aforementioned warning as something decreed and fixed. The promise is ascribed to God because such threat can only issue from Him. Perhaps this is why the pronoun "His" is sufficient in referring to God here, instead of a noun.

إِنَّ هَٰذِهِۦ تَذْكِرَةٌ ۖ فَمَن شَاءَ ٱتَّخَذَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِۦ سَبِيلًا ﴿١٩﴾

(73:19) ***This is indeed a reminder* (tadhkirah). *So let anyone who wills take a way toward his Lord.***

Tadhkirah means a type of admonition that reminds one with a certain line of action and practice. The demonstrative pronoun "this" refers to all preceding verses, including the threats and warnings.

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… So let anyone who wills…: This is a conditional statement where the complementis not stated completely. It is common in such cases to infer the omitted complement in a way that is commensurate to the mentioned part. The implied meaning is: "So if anyone wishes to pursue a

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1 The meaning would be: "How will your act of avoidance of the punishment be on the day…?" (Trans.)

path toward their Lord, let them pursue a path toward their Lord." It is also said that the omitted complement is "taking admonition."[1] What is meant by the clause, *take a way toward his Lord* is following a path that brings one closer to Him. The way here would be holding correct beliefs and obeying in practice.

The above is what the exegetes have said. Another possibility is that the demonstrative pronoun "this" refers to the command to stand vigil and pray at the night, which was directed to the Prophet at the beginning of the verse. This verse is meant to extend that rule to all believers, after its initial injunction which was particularly addressed to the Prophet. This generalization is denoted by: *So let anyone who wills*. This interpretation can be confirmed by the appearance of the exact same verse in Sūrah al-Dahr after reference to the night prayer: *and glorify Him the night long* (76:26). We can deduce from these verses that the night prayer is a very special way that leads one toward their Lord.

Examining Narrations

(1) The Quraysh got together at Dār al-Nadwah and said, "We must pick a name for this man so that the people renounce him."
Someone suggested, "Soothsayer!"
But they said, "No, he is not a soothsayer."
Another one exclaimed, "Lunatic!"
"No," they replied, "he is not a lunatic either."
"Sorcerer!"
"No, he is not a sorcerer either."
Finally someone said, "He causes a split between close friends."
So the polytheists dispersed, having agreed on that.
When the news of that reached the Prophet, he wrapped up (*tazammala*) and cloaked (*tadaththara*) himself in his robe. Then Gabriel came to him and said: *O you wrapped up in your raiment!* (73:1); *O you wrapped in thy cloak!* (74:1).[2]
When the news of that reached the Prophet, he wrapped up

1 The meaning would be: "So if anyone wishes to take admonition, let them take a way toward their Lord." (Trans.)

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Bazzār, al-Ṭabarānī's *al-Awsaṭ*, and Abū Nuʿaym's *al-Dalāʾil*, on the authority of Jābir.

(*tazammala*) and cloaked (*tadaththara*) himself in his robe. Then Gabriel came to him and said: *O you wrapped up in your raiment!* (73:1), *O you wrapped in thy cloak!* (74:1).[1]

Author's comment: The last part of this narration is questionable, since it implies that the two chapters 73 and 74 were revealed simultaneously. Further, the Qur'an narrates several labels and accusations that they applied to the Prophet—including soothsayer, sorcerer, lunatic and poet, some of which are found in the very Sūrah al-Muddaththir [74:24-25]—but it never mentions "one who causes a split between close friends."

(2) ʿĀʾishah said: The Messenger of God rarely slept any part of the night ever since God ordered him: *Stand vigil through the night, except a little* (73:2).[2]

(3) ʿĀʾishah was asked, "What was Prophet's bedcover (*tazmīl*)?" She said, "A cover that was fourteen cubits (*dhirāʿ*) long. Half of it covered me as I slept, and the other half covered him as he prayed." She was inquired, "What was it made of?"

"By God," she explained, "it was neither fur, nor sarcenet, nor fleece, nor silk, nor wool. Its surface was of hair, and its lining was fluff."[3]

Author's comment: This account is known to be fabricated, since this chapter was one of the earliest sūrahs that were revealed in Mecca, while the Prophet's married life with ʿĀʾishah began only in Medina, after his Migration.

(4) Once the Prophet entered Khadījah's home when he could barely keep on his feet due to fear. "Wrap me up!" he said. Then, before long, Gabriel called out to him: *O you wrapped up in your raiment!* (73:1).[4]

(5) When the verse, *O you wrapped up in your raiment* (73:1) was revealed, the Prophet observed the night vigil for ten years as commanded by God. A group of his Companions also did so with

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Bazzār, al-Ṭabarānī's *al-Awsaṭ*, and Abū Nuʿaym's *al-Dalāʾil*, on the authority of Jābir.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd-Allāh b. Aḥmad's *al-Zuhd*, and Muḥammad b. Naṣr's *al-Ṣalāh*.

3 *Al-Kashshāf*.

4 *Jawāmiʿ al-jāmiʿ*.

him. Then, after ten years, God revealed: *Indeed your Lord knows that you stand vigil… and maintain the prayer* (73:20). Thereby, God reduced their burden after ten years."[1]

Author's comment: According to other narrations, the last verse which reduced their burden was revealed after a year, or after eight months. Moreover, keeping night vigil was only obligatory for the Prophet, which can be inferred from the verse: *This is indeed a reminder…* (73:19) according to our suggested meaning above. This can also be inferred from the above narration, which says "a *group* of his Companions."

(6) Once Imam al-Bāqir was asked about the verse: *Stand vigil through the night, except a little* (73:2). He explained: God commanded him [the Prophet] to pray every night, except for some nights here and there where he could not pray at all.[2]

Author's comment: This narration presents one of the possible meanings of the verse. *Majmaᶜ al-bayān* says:

> *A half of it* (73:3) is a *badal* (apposition, replacement, interpretation) for *a little* (73:2), which makes it an interpretation for the exception [in verse 73:2].

Then it quotes the following narration:

(7) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: *A little* (73:2) means *a half*. Or he may *reduce a little from* that little, *Or add to* that little a little.[3]

(8) Once the Messenger of God was inquired about the verse: *and recite the Qur'an in measure* (73:4). He explained: Pronounce it clearly. Do not disperse it like dried dates, nor cut through it [quickly] like poetry. Pause at its wonders. Shake your hearts by it. Let not your objective be reaching the end of the sūrah.[4]

(9) A similar hadith to this is narrated from Imam ᶜAlī as follows: Pronounce it clearly. Do not cut through it [quickly] like poetry, nor disperse it as scattered sand, but empty your hard hearts [with

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ᶜAbd b. Ḥumayd, Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Abī Ḥātim, on the authority of Saᶜīd b. Jubayr.

2 *Al-Tahdhīb*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Muslim.

3 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-ᶜAskarī's *al-Mawāᶜiẓ*, on the authority of [Imam] ᶜAlī.

it].[1] And let not your objective be reaching the end of the sūrah.[2]

(10) The Messenger of God was asked, "Who recites the Qur'an the best?" He replied, "The one that when you hear their recitation, you can see that they are in awe of God."[3]

(11) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: The Qur'an should not be recited rapidly, but should be recited in measure (*tartīl*). Hence, when you come across a verse that mentions paradise, pause there and ask God to bless you with paradise. And when you come across a verse that mentions hell, pause there and seek refuge in God from the fire.[4]

(12) Imam al-Ṣādiq defined *tartīl* (reciting in measure) as follows: It is read with [measured] pauses and a beautiful voice.[5]

(13) Umm Salamah said: The Messenger of God used to recite the Qur'an verse by verse.[6]

(14) Anas said: The Messenger of God used to extend his voice [or the words][7] when he recited.[8]

(15) Once Ḥārith b. Hishām asked the Messenger of God, "O Messenger of God! How do you receive revelation?" He explained, "Sometimes it comes to me like the chiming of a gong, and that is the heaviest on me. Then it passes me while I have retained what was said. And sometimes the angel [of revelation] takes the form of a man, and I retain what he says.[9]

(16) ʿĀʾishah said: Sometimes the Messenger of God received revelation while he was riding a camel. Then he would tap on the

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1 A more accurate version says: "Let your hard hearts tremble with it." (Trans.)

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAbd-Allāh b. Sulaymān, from on the authority of Imam al-Ṣādiq.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Shaybah, on the authority of Ṭāwūs.

4 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAlī b. Ḥamzah.

5 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr.

6 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

7 That is, he did not recite monotonously. (Trans.)

8 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

9 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

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camel's neck [to kneel].[1]

(17) ʿĀʾishah said: Once I saw him being revealed to on a very cold day. When it finished, his forehead was perspiring heavily.[2]

(18) Imam ʿAlī said: Some parts of the Qur'an have abrogated some others. One must adopt the most recent commands of the Messenger of God. The last part that was revealed to him was Sūrah al-Māʾidah (Chapter 5), which abrogated was revealed before it, but was not abrogated later by anything. It was revealed when he was riding a gray female mule. The revelation was so heavy on the animal that she stopped, and her belly lowered, to the point that I could see her navel almost touch the ground.[3]

Author's comment: Assuming that this narration is authentic, it describes a physical embodiment of something intrinsically non-physical. Many other similar examples to this are found in the accounts of the miracles and wonderous acts of the saints. Nevertheless, it is not sensible for revelation—which is a form of speech—to have material weight.

(19) Concerning *Indeed the event of the night is firmer in stability and more upright in respect to speech* (73:6) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: *More upright in respect to speech* means getting up from the bed for the sake of God, not for anything else.[4]

(20) Concerning *Indeed the event of the night…* (73:6) it is narrated from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq: This refers to the praying at the end of the night.[5]

(21) Once [Imam] Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī[6] was seen praying [a supererogatory prayer] between the Sunset and Evening Prayers (*maghrib* and *ʿishāʾ*). When he was inquired about it, he said: This is part of

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

3 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿĪsá b. ʿUbayd, on the authority of his father, on the authority of his grandfather.

4 *Al-Tahdhīb*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Hishām b. Sālim. The same hadith is reported via two other chains of narration in *al-Tahdhīb* and *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*, on the authority of Hishām b. Sālim.

5 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

6 Most narrations mention ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn. (Trans.)

al-nāshiʾah (the event of the night, the vigil of the night).[1]

(22) Concerning *and devote yourself* (tabattal) *to Him with a complete devotion* (73:8) it is narrated from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq: *Tabttul* is to raise one's hands in the prayer (*ṣalāh*).[2]

(23) In a similar narration the Imam said: It means raising your hands toward God and entreating Him with humility.[3]

Author's comment: The last two narrations can be matched with *qunūt* in the ritual prayer (*ṣalāh*).[4]

(24) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *tabattul* (73:8): It means raising the hands and moving the index fingers.

(25) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: *Tabattul* means [supplication while] pointing with the finger.[5]

(26) In another narration the Imam said: It means supplicating while pointing out one finger.[6]

(27) Concerning *and food that chokes…* (73:13) ʿAbd-Allāh b. ʿUmar said: The Prophet fainted upon hearing someone recite this verse.[7]

(28) Concerning *and the mountains will be like dunes of running sand* (kathīban mahīlan) (73:14) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It means, like unstable dunes of shifting sand.

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn al-Mundhir.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Muslim, Zurārah and Ḥumrān.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr.

4 In Shiʿa law it is strongly recommended to raise the hands and open the palms toward the heaven after the recital of the second unit (*rakʿah*) of the prayer and make supplication (*duʿāʾ*) to God. This is called *qunūt*. (Trans.)

5 *Al-Kāfī*.

6 *Al-Kāfī*.

7 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

Verse 20

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ تَقُومُ أَدْنَىٰ مِنْ ثُلُثَيِ اللَّيْلِ وَنِصْفَهُ وَثُلُثَهُ وَطَائِفَةٌ مِنَ الَّذِينَ
مَعَكَ ۚ وَاللَّهُ يُقَدِّرُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ ۚ عَلِمَ أَنْ لَنْ تُحْصُوهُ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ ۖ فَاقْرَءُوا مَا
تَيَسَّرَ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ ۚ عَلِمَ أَنْ سَيَكُونُ مِنْكُمْ مَرْضَىٰ ۙ وَآخَرُونَ يَضْرِبُونَ فِي
الْأَرْضِ يَبْتَغُونَ مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ ۙ وَآخَرُونَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ۖ فَاقْرَءُوا مَا
تَيَسَّرَ مِنْهُ ۚ وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَقْرِضُوا اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا ۚ وَمَا تُقَدِّمُوا
لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ تَجِدُوهُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ هُوَ خَيْرًا وَأَعْظَمَ أَجْرًا ۚ وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا اللَّهَ ۖ إِنَّ
اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

(73:20) ***Indeed your Lord knows that you stand vigil nearly two thirds of the night—or [at times] a half or a third of it—along with a group of those who are with you. Allah measures the night and the day. He knows that you cannot span it, and so He was lenient toward you. So recite as much of the Qur'an as is feasible. He knows that some of you will be sick, while others will travel in the land seeking Allah's grace, and yet others will fight in the way of Allah. So recite as much of it as is feasible, and maintain the prayer and pay the zakāt and lend Allah a good loan. Whatever you send ahead for your souls of good, you will find it with Allah [in a form] that is better and greater with respect to reward. And plead to Allah for forgiveness; indeed Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful.***

Introduction & Commentary

The Prophet was ordered to observe night vigil at the beginning of the chapter; a command that was generalized to all believers in the last verse: *This is indeed a reminder…* (73:19). The current verse lightens their burden and reduces their obligation to *as much of the Qur'an as is feasible*, without necessarily abrogating the initial command. In other words, the verse does not *prohibit* them from praying two thirds, half or one third of the night.

There are several accounts which say that this verse was revealed in

Mecca eight months, one year, or ten years following the rest of the sūrah. However, one should note that the verse talks about *zakāt* alongside the ritual prayer (*ṣalāh*) and supererogatory charity: *maintain the prayer and pay the zakāt and lend Allah a good loan*. This suggests that what is meant by *zakāt* in the verse is the specific religious due which was legislated after the Prophet's migration to Medina. Some have suggested that *zakāt* was ordained in Mecca with unspecified limits; then its limits were clarified in Medina. However, there is no evidence to corroborate this view. Others have said that the verse mentions an obligation which was legislated later with a delay. This view is also unfounded.

Furthermore, the verse mentions jihad: *and yet others will fight in the way of Allah*. Yet, given the circumstances prevailing in Mecca, it was not in the interest of the Prophet's call to endorse jihad in any way whatsoever. Therefore, the verse is apparently Medinan, not Meccan. Some exegetes have favored this view.

This verse is addressed to the Prophet. Referring to God as *your Lord* conveys a sense of divine mercy and grace. Similarly, saying that *He knows that you stand* is an expression of God's gratitude toward His servants. He says elsewhere: *and your endeavour is well-appreciated* (76:22). .

… nearly* (adná) *two thirds of the night…: *Adná* (nearly, almost, approximately) is a comparative adjective that is derived from *dunuww*, which is synonymous with *qurb* (nearness, proximity, vicinity). Meanwhile, in common usage it implies being *below* and *less* than something. For instance, if it is said, "Their number is *adná* (close, near) to ten" it implies that they are nine, not eleven. Hence, the verse's expression would mean slightly less than two thirds of the night.

… or [at times] a half or a third of it…: The conjunction "or" pertains to all nights. The meaning is: "He knows that sometimes you stand vigil close to two thirds of the night, sometimes half of the night, and sometimes one third of the night."

… along with a group of* (min) *those who are with you…: They are *with you* in terms of *īmān* (belief, faith). The preposition *min* (of, from) is partitive. This means that some of the believers used to observe the night vigil in the same manner as the Prophet. Some exegetes have suggested that the preposition *min* is descriptive. The problem with this should be obvious.[1]

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1 The meaning would be: "Along with a group, which are those who are with

… Allah measures the night and the day…: This expression explains and justifies the expression, *your Lord knows*. The meaning is: "How could God not know this when He is the One Who has created and apportioned everything?" Since He has encompassed the night and the day entirely, He has also encompassed two thirds, half and one third of them. The verse has used the name Allah instead of Lord or other names here because God's *taqdīr* (measurement, ordainment, allotment) is a branch of His creation, and creation is in the hands of Allah, Who is the Source of everything.

… He knows that you cannot span it* (tuḥṣūhu, from iḥṣāʾ), *and so He was lenient toward you. So recite as much of the Qur'an as is feasible…: *Iḥṣāʾ* means "to grasp the full extent, count, and measure of something." The pronoun "it" in *cannot span it* refers to "measurement" [implied by *Allah measures the night and the day*]. It could also refer to the act of keeping vigil one third, half or nearly two thirds of the night. Being able to cover this amount of night vigil is very difficult for the majority of the people, especially given that the night's duration constantly alters throughout the year. It is even more difficult if one sleeps first, and then wakes up for one of the three measures—unless one keeps vigil for the entire duration of the night out of precaution, or finds some other solution that serves this purpose.

… He knows that you cannot span it…: That is, God knows that most believers cannot fulfill the span of night vigil that they are instructed.

… so He was lenient* (fa-tāba, from tawbah) *toward you…: What is meant by God's *tawbah* (returning, repenting) is directing His mercy toward them through a reduction of their obligation. God takes the initiative to make *tawbah* toward His servants by spreading His mercy over them. The impact of this first divine *tawbah* manifest in several ways: (1) The servants will succeed in also returning and repenting toward their Lord. (2) They will succeed in obeying Him in general. (3) He removes or reduces part of their obligations. The Qur'an says: *Then He turned clemently toward them so that they might be penitent* (9:118). Once they repent to their Lord, then God has a second *tawbah* toward His servants. The impact of that is the remission of their sins. We have already discussed this.[1]

… So recite as much of the Qur'an as is feasible…: This expression

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you." This is against the apparent meaning of the text and also the subsequent part of the verse. (Trans.)

1 See the author's exposition of verse 9:118. (Trans.)

lightens the obligation of keeping vigil at night for all believers through reducing its extent. The letter *fā*ʾ (so, then, therefore) shows that this statement is made as a conclusion to God's knowledge that they cannot span it. The subtle usage of the letter *fā*ʾ here shows that the current verse does not abrogate the initial obligation in the sūrah, but only lowers the expectation. Abrogation would mean that standing vigil for one third, half, or nearly two thirds of the night would be an unlawful innovation in religion.[1] If that level of worship were not possible for anyone whatsoever, it would not have been legislated to begin with, because *Allah does not task any soul beyond its capacity* (2:286). What is not reasonable is to expect that from every individual. The letter *fā*ʾ shows that God's knowledge about the ability of *all* believers to meet this obligation has resulted in a reduction of its stringency to the extent that all believers can endure.

Moreover, the verse acknowledges that the Prophet and some believers in particular stood vigil for one third, a half, or nearly two thirds of the night. Yet, it says in a general tone: *you cannot span it*, where the pronoun "you" includes the abovementioned group and other believers. This shows that the obligation was not burdensome for every single person, but it was burdensome for them as a whole. That is why God reduced the requirement by saying: *So recite as much of the Qur'an as is feasible*. The law was lightened for the general audience so that everyone can have some share of it, without negating the original law mentioned at the outset of

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1 This narrow definition of abrogation (*naskh*) stems from how the concept is addressed in principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl*). Since they are steeped in this discipline, the author—and many other scholars—are very sensitive to this topic, and are reluctant to admit the abrogation of any verse in the Qur'an. However, *naskh* is defined much more broadly in the Qur'an than in *uṣūl*. In fact, the author's interpretation of the verse matches the Qur'anic sense of abrogation. The abrogation of a verse does not mean that it is of no use anymore whatsoever, but it means that its legislative requirements and practical implications are no longer applicable. The verse still remains as a word of God which was revealed provisionally in certain circumstances. The existence of *naskh* in the Qur'an, as explicitly stated in verses 2:106 and 16:101, is clear evidence that the injunctions of the shariah should not be viewed as immutable laws forever, nor the practice of early Muslims (*salaf*) as a standard for the later generations. (Trans.)

the chapter. The first command is still applicable to anyone who has the ability and willpower to span these periods of the night. It should also be noted that while the command addressed to the Prophet at the beginning of the verse apparently implies an obligatory act, it is a supererogatory ritual for the rest of the believers, as we explained above.

Exegetes have diverging views concerning a number of issues here: (1) Whether standing vigil means the night prayer, or reciting the Qur'an outside the ritual prayer. (2) Whether the night prayer is obligatory for everyone, supererogatory for everyone, or obligatory for the Prophet but supererogatory for the believers. (3) Whether the initial command was abrogated by reducing it to a lesser requirement in this verse, or it was abrogated by replacing the night prayer with recitation of what is feasible from the Qur'an. However, there is not much benefit to address and discuss their opinions.

… He knows that some of you will be sick, while others will travel in the land seeking Allah's grace, and yet others will fight in the way of Allah…: This sentence provides another reason for reducing the initial command to keep vigil for one third, half, or nearly two thirds of the night. The first reason was that such level of worship is burdensome for the majority of the believers. Here it adds that spanning and fulfilling this level of night vigil is very challenging for those who are ill, the travelers, and fighters in the way of God, given their circumstances.

… while others will travel in the land seeking Allah's grace…: What is meant here is travelling from one place to another in order to earn a living through trade.

… So recite as much of it as is feasible…: This sentence confirms the abovementioned reduction of the burden by reiterating it. The antecedent of the pronoun "it"—in *of it*—is *the Qur'an*. What is meant is to observe as much night vigil as one's time and conditions permit.

… and maintain the prayer and pay the zakāt and lend Allah a good loan…: *The prayer* and *the zakāt* here refer to the obligatory rituals. If the verse is Medinan, then the prayer would be the five daily prayers. If it is Meccan, it would be any form of prayer that was prescribed at that time. To *lend Allah a good loan* pertains to financial charities in the way of God other than the ritual *zakāt* (poor-rate, almsgiving).

Adding these injunctions shows that the other religious obligations remain valid and applicable as they were. One should continue to observe them diligently as obligatory acts. In other words, the reduction of the

burden with respect to the night vigil does not extend to all obligations. In this respect, the verse can be compared to the Verse of Whispering: *So, as you did not do it, and Allah was lenient toward you, maintain the prayer and pay the zakāt, and obey Allah and His Messenger* (58:13).[1]

… Whatever you send ahead for your souls of good, you will find it with Allah [in a form] that is **(huwa)** ***better and greater with respect to reward…:*** What is meant by *good* here is any act of obedience, whether obligatory or supererogatory.[2] There are two possible interpretations for the pronoun *huwa* (that, it): (1) It is an explicit repetition of the pronoun "it" in *you will find it*, mentioned for emphasis.[3] (2) It indicates that what follows is a predicate for what is before it.[4]

The meaning is: "Any act of obedience that you send ahead for yourselves—that is, for your eternal life in the hereafter—you will find it preserved with God—that is, on the day of meeting Him—in a way that is more rewarding and better than anything that you did [of wholesome actions] or anything that you avoided [of unwholesome pleasures]."

… And plead to Allah for forgiveness; indeed Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful…: The verse closes by ordering the believers to seek forgiveness from God. The two divine attributes mentioned at the end of the verse are a promising indication that they shall indeed qualify for God's

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1 Verse 58:13 abrogated the requirement of giving alms before whispering to the Messenger of God. Yet, it clarifies that this abrogation does not extend to the other obligations such as praying, giving *zakāt*, and obeying God and His messenger. (Trans.)

2 *Of good* is a descriptive apposition for *whatever*. (Auth.)
The meaning is: "Whatever good deed you send ahead." (Trans.)

3 The meaning would be: "And that certainly is better" or "And that is exactly what is best." (Trans.)

4 The meaning would be: "Whatever you send ahead for your souls of good, you will find it in a better form, resting with Allah." The pronoun *huwa* is added because of the interruption created between the subject and the predicate by the introduction of *with Allah*. Another possibility is that *huwa* marks the subject of a new sentence. Hence, the verse is making two statements: (i) "Whatever good you send ahead will be preserved for you." (ii) "Whatever good you send ahead will be better for you." All these meanings are very similar. (Trans.)

forgiveness and mercy. It is plausible to say that "seeking God's forgiveness" here includes any act of obedience, because all such acts are instruments for reaching divine forgiveness. Hence, observing any act of obedience can be called pleading to Him for forgiveness (*istighfār*).

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning *Indeed your Lord knows that you stand vigil nearly two thirds of the night* (73:20) Imam al-Bāqir said: The Prophet acted upon this instruction [as outlined at the beginning of the sūrah], and encouraged the people to do likewise, but that was difficult for them.

Concerning *He knows that you cannot span it* (73:20) he said: Some Companions used to stand vigil without knowing if they had done a half or two thirds of the night. Some of them would keep vigil until the morning, lest they should miss the obligatory prayer. Then God revealed: *Indeed your Lord knows that you stand vigil… He knows that you cannot span it* (73:20), meaning [that you do not know when is] the midway or one third through the night. Thus the initial instruction was abrogated by the command: *So recite as much of the Qur'an as is feasible* (73:20). Know that every prophet that was sent [by God] used to seclude himself for the night prayer, but no prophet performed the night prayer at the beginning of the night.[1]

Author's comment: In short, this narration suggests that the opening verse of the chapter prescribed the night prayer, while the last verse abrogated that obligation. Similar narrations to this are reported through the Sunni chains of transmission, from Ibn ʿAbbās and others. We discussed this view [of abrogation] above.

(2) Concerning *along with a group of those who are with you* (73:20) Ibn ʿAbbās said: This refers to ʿAlī and Abū Dharr.[2]

(3) Concerning *So recite as much of it as is feasible* (73:20) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "What is feasible of it is the amount [that you would recite] with the humbleness of the heart and the purity of the

1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū Jārūd.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Ḥākim Abū al-Qāsim Ibrāhīm al-Ḥaskānī, via its chain of narration, on the authority of al-Kalbī, on the authority of Abū Ṣāliḥ.

soul."[1]

(4) Concerning *So recite as much of it as is feasible* (73:20) the Prophet said: That is a hundred verses.[2]

(5) The Messenger of God said: "Anyone who imports some food into a Muslim city and sells it based on the current market rates will have the rank of a martyr before God." Then he recited: *while others will travel in the land seeking Allah's grace, and yet others will fight in the way of Allah* (73:20).[3]

(6) Once Imam [al-Ṣādiq] was asked about the statement: *and lend Allah a good loan* (73:20). He explained: This refers to charities and donations other than the ritual *zakāt*.[4]

(7) Imam ᶜAlī said: Plead frequently to God for forgiveness, so that you may attract sustenance [in abundance]. Send ahead good deeds as much as you can, so that you may find it tomorrow.[5]

Author's comment: The last part of this hadith is deduced from the verse: *Whatever you send ahead for your souls of good, you will find it with Allah [in a form] that is better and greater with respect to reward* (73:20).

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1 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, narrated from Imam al-Riḍā, from his father.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Ṭabarānī and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Ibn ᶜAbbās.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of ᶜAbd-Allāh b. Masᶜūd.

4 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Zurᶜah, on the authority of Samāᶜah.

5 *Al-Khiṣāl*, part of the hadith of 400.

Chapter 74

al-Muddaththir (The Cloak)

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Verses 1-7

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمنِ الرَّحِيم

يا أَيُّهَا الْمُدَّثِّرُ ﴿١﴾ قُمْ فَأَنْذِرْ ﴿٢﴾ وَ رَبَّكَ فَكَبِّرْ ﴿٣﴾ وَ ثِيابَكَ فَطَهِّرْ ﴿٤﴾ وَ الرُّجْزَ فَاهْجُرْ ﴿٥﴾ وَ لا تَمْنُنْ تَسْتَكْثِرُ ﴿٦﴾ وَ لِرَبِّكَ فَاصْبِرْ ﴿٧﴾

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

(74:1) *O you wrapped in thy cloak!*
(74:2) *Rise up and warn!*
(74:3) *Magnify your Lord,*
(74:4) *and purify your garment,*
(74:5) *and keep away from all impurity!*
(74:6) *And show not favor, thinking it is much!*
(74:7) *And be patient for your Lord.*

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Introduction & Commentary

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 56 verses. The sūrah begins by commanding the Prophet to warn the people, with a tone which suggests that it was revealed at the outset of the Prophet's mission. It then describes the exalted status and lofty position of the Qur'an. It vehemently threatens those who deny this Book, accuse it of sorcery, and turn away from its call.

This is among the earliest chapters—called *al-ʿatāʾiq* (the ancient ones)—which were revealed to the Prophet at the beginning of his mission. Some have even suggested that it was the very first sūrah of the Qur'an to be revealed to the Prophet. The context of the sūrah refutes this view, since it talks about an incident when the Prophet recited the Qur'an to the people, who then responded by rejecting it, turning away from it, and calling it a *magic handed down* (74:24). Others have suggested that

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the first seven verses of the chapter were the very first revelation of the Qur'an. This entails that the sūrah was not revealed at once. The context of the opening seven verses does not reject this possibility, but it seems that the first verses of the Qur'an to be revealed were the opening verses of Sūrah al-ʿAlaq (Chapter 96), as indicated by their theme and context.

Another suggested possibility is that this sūrah was the first chapter that was revealed to the Prophet when he was ordered to make his call public, after a period of secret *daʿwah* (mission, propagation, call). This transition is reflected in the verse: *So proclaim what you have been commanded, and turn away from the polytheists* (15:94). This view can reconcile between a number of seemingly contradictory accounts, which say: (1) This was the first sūrah that was revealed. (2) It was revealed after Sūrah al-ʿAlaq. (3) This sūrah and Sūrah al-Muzzammil (Chapter 73) were revealed together. Nevertheless, this view remains at the level of mere possibility.

What we can say for sure is that this sūrah was one of the earliest chapters of the Qur'an that were revealed to the Prophet. Its opening seven verses command him to warn the people, and include other injunctions as implications and requirements of that.

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يا أَيُّهَا الْمُدَّثِّرُ ﴿١﴾

(74:1) *O you wrapped in thy cloak* (al-muddaththir)*!*

Muddaththir was originally *mutadaththir*, derived from the gerund *tadaththur*, which means "wrapping oneself in a garment to sleep." The meaning is: "O you who has wrapped himself in a cloak in order to sleep." The Prophet was in such a condition when he received this verse, which bears a graceful and affectionate tone. The title given to him in this verse (*al-muddaththir*) was taken from the state he was in. This verse is similar to the verse: *O you wrapped up in your raiment!* (73:1).

Other suggested interpretations are:

(1) The prophet was covered with prophethood, where prophethood is metaphorically compared to a garment since it was a source of adornment and elegance for the Prophet.

(2) The verse refers to the Prophet's seclusion and absence from the people. He was addressed by this title when he was in the cave of Ḥirāʾ.

(3) What is meant is resting in leisure. The meaning is: "O you who are resting in leisure! The time of rest is over. Now is the time to labor over your responsibility to guide the people."

Comment: These are possible meanings, but what springs first to the mind from the context is what we mentioned above.

قُمْ فَأَنْذِرْ ﴿٢﴾

(74:2) ***Rise up and warn!***

This is apparently a command to warn, without referring to any particular audience. The meaning is "Carry out the task of warning." Two alternative interpretations suggested by the exegetes are: (1) The audience is omitted and is implied to be the Prophet's near relatives. This makes the verse comparable to: *Warn the nearest of your kinsfolk* (26:214). That was the applicable audience at the outset of the Prophet's mission. (2) There is a general audience which is omitted. Thus the verse is similar to: *We have sent you to all humankind* (34:28).

The Prophet's mission consisted of both warning and giving glad tiding. The latter is not mentioned here because this was one of the earliest chapters that was revealed to the Prophet at the outset of his mission. At that stage, the aspect of warning was more applicable than giving glad tidings.

وَ رَبَّكَ فَكَبِّرْ ﴿٣﴾

(74:3) ***Magnify*** **(fa-kabbir, from takbīr)** ***your Lord!***

That is, you should ascribe grandeur and magnificence to your Lord in belief and action, verbally and practically. This means holding God to be clear of having anyone equal to Him or superior to Him. Nothing and no one can subdue Him. He has no partner, is not defiled by any defect, and is not defined by any attribute. It is narrated from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt that the meaning of *takbīr* (exaltation, magnification) is that God is greater than any description. He is greater than any quality by which we may describe Him, including this very quality [of absolute transcendence]. This is the most sublime level of *tawḥīd* (monotheism, absolute oneness), which is found particularly in Islamic teachings, compared to the other heavenly revelations. Referring to God as *your Lord* bears a subtle indication that the Prophet was the only one at the time who held this level of monotheism.

This should clarify the fine distinction between *takbīr* and *tasbīḥ* (glorification). *Tasbīḥ* means glorifying God and freeing Him from all descriptions which imply a sense of defect, imperfection and non-existence,

such as death, weakness and ignorance. *Takbīr*, however, means freeing Him from all qualities whatsoever. It is to hold Him above any existential or non-existential attribute that we may choose to describe Him with, including this very attribute. This is because every attribute is limited by conceptual boundaries that define that attribute and distinguish it from other attributes, whereas the Absolute is not encompassed by any boundary or definition. The reader should reflect on this.

Some exegetes have matched the verse with the uttering of *Allāh akbar* (God is greater) in the ritual prayer (called *takbīrat al-iḥrām*). According to the author of *al-Kashshāf*, the letter *fā*ʾ (lit. so, then, therefore) in *fakabbir* implies a conditional statement. The effective meaning is: "Under all circumstances continue to magnify your Lord."

وَ ثِيابَكَ فَطَهِّرْ ﴿٤﴾

(74:4) ***And purify your garment!***

This verse has been interpreted in a number of ways:

(1) Purifying one's garment is a metaphor for refining one's actions.

Comment: This is a plausible view because one's behavior is like an outer garment that covers the inner beliefs of the soul. One's appearance is a reflection and representation of one's inside. It is rather common among Arabs to use this metaphor in reference to righteous deeds.

(2) It means purifying the soul and restraining it from sins and disobedience.

(3) It means shortening one's dress, which prevents it from being stained by impurities. A long garment that drags on the ground is more likely to become impure.

(4) It means keeping one's spouse away from disbelief and sin, as per the verse: *they are a garment for you* (2:187).

(5) It means acquiring moral virtues and noble traits.

(6) The verse maintains its apparent meaning, which is to cleanse one's clothes from impurities as one of the conditions of prayer (*ṣalāh*).

Comment: Based on this view, it would be appropriate to also interpret the last verse—*Magnify your Lord* (74:3)—as referring to the opening *takbīr* of the prayer. This way, the two verses mark the prescription of the ritual prayer, which was legislated at the very beginning of the Prophetic mission. It may be objected that these verses were revealed at a time when

the ritual prayer was not yet prescribed. However, we should realize that the prayer was an obligation from the very outset of the Prophet's mission, albeit not in the same form that it took later on. Yes, the five daily prayers were prescribed on the night of ascension (*miʿrāj*), initially adding up to ten units, with seven more being added subsequently. Nevertheless, the concept of ritual prayer (*ṣalāh*) existed from the very beginning, as one can see in this sūrah, as well as in Sūrah al-ʿAlaq, Sūrah al-Muzzammil, and in hadith.[1]

There are further interpretations for purifying one's garment, but they can be reduced to what we listed above. The most plausible of these views are the first and the last.

وَ الرُّجْزَ فَاهْجُرْ ۝٥

(74:5) ***And keep away from all impurity*** **(al-rujz)*!***

There are three suggested interpretations for this verse:

(1) *Rujz* and *rijz* mean "punishment." What is meant here is to keep away from the *cause* of punishment, which is sin and disobedience. The meaning is: "Refrain from sin and disobedience."

(2) *Rujz* is a general term that is applied to any evil act or trait. What is meant here is to avoid anything whatsoever that God dislikes and does not approve. It could also mean vices and evil traits in particular, assuming that evil deeds are already covered by the last verse: *And purify your garment* (74:4).

(3) *Rujz* means "idol." The verse prohibits the worship of idols.

وَ لا تَمْنُنْ تَسْتَكْثِرُ ۝٦

(74:6) ***And show not favor*** **(tamnun, from mann)*, thinking it is much*** **(tastakthiru, from istikthār)*!***

Given the theme and context of the verses, *mann* here means mentioning one's favor upon someone in a way that hurts their feeling and ruins one's benevolence. This is how it is used in these verses: *Do not render your charities void by reproaches and affronts* (2:264); *They count it as a favour to you that they have embraced Islam* (49:17).[2] *Istikthār* here means "seeing

1 See verses 73:20, 74:43, 96:10. (Trans.)

2 *Mann*, *minnah* and *imtinān* are used in the Qur'an and hadith when a benefactor reminds the beneficiary about their favor in order to make them

and considering something to be great and significant." In this verse it does not bear its literal meaning of "seeking abundance and wanting more."

The meaning is: "Do not suppose that you have done a favor or you have done much if you obey the abovementioned commands—of rising to warn the people, magnifying your Lord, purifying your garment, and keeping away from impurities. Let not that lead you to self-complacency, because you are only a servant. As such, you do not possess anything by yourself, except for what God has bestowed upon you and has authorized you over. Even in that, your possession and power are subordinate to His. Hence, all command belongs to Him, and upon you is to comply."

Exegetes have offered other views which are not quite commensurate with the context of the verse. Here is a list of their interpretations:

(1) Do not give something in expectation of receiving more in return.
(2) Do not make the people feel indebted to you, and do not expect a great payment from them because of the Qur'an and the prophethood which are given to you by God.
(3) Do not make it a favor upon your ummah (nation, people) that you have communicated the message to them.
(4) Do not get listless in your practice, thinking too high of your service.
(5) When you give something to people, do not remind them of your favor, assuming that it is much.
(6) When you give anything [in charity], give it for the sake of your Lord, and be patient until God rewards you for it.[1]
(7) Do not give something [in loan] while demanding more in return. Hence, the verse prohibits *ribā* (usury, interest).[2]

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feel obliged. (Trans.)

1 The last part of this interpretation pertains to the next verse. (Trans.)

2 It is common in the Qur'an to mention the prayer (*ṣalāh*) and almsgiving (*zakāt*) together, where *zakāt* is meant in a general sense, including all forms of financial charity. In this light, another possible meaning is that this verse refers to almsgiving after the mention of prayer in verses 74:3-4, much like verses 74:43-44 below. Furthermore, charity is a main theme of Chapter 68 (Sūrah al-Qalam), which is also among the earliest chapters revealed to the Prophet in Mecca (called *al-ʿatāʾiq*). (Trans.)

وَ لِرَبِّكَ فَاصْبِرْ ۝٧

(74:7) ***And be patient for your Lord!***

What is meant here is "for the sake of your Lord," meaning for His satisfaction. Patience is used in an unconditional sense, which includes all three types of it: (1) being patient in the face of afflictions; (2) patiently enduring the hardships of obedience; (3) abstaining from sins with patience. The meaning is: "Be patient for the sake of your Lord when you are met with any affliction or abuse as you rise to warn the people and execute the above command. Also be patient with God's obedience, and against His disobedience."

Our interpretation embraces all the various meanings that the exegetes have suggested, such as:

(1) The verse commands patience in and of itself, irrespective of its object.
(2) It pertains to being patient against the abuses of the polytheists.
(3) It means patience in performing religious obligations.

Examining Narrations

(1) Yaḥyá b. Abī Kathīr says: Once I asked Abū Salamah b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān about the first thing that was revealed of the Qur'an. He replied, "It was *O you wrapped in thy cloak* (74:1)."
"But the people say," I followed up, "that it was: *Read in the Name of your Lord who created* (96:1)."
He said, "I asked the same thing to Jābir b. ʿAbd-Allāh. He told me: I shall only tell you what the Messenger of God told us:
'I was keeping retreat in [the cave of] Ḥirāʾ. When my retreat was over, I heard a voice calling me. I looked right, but there was nothing. I looked left, but there was nothing. I looked behind, but there was nothing. Then I raised my head, and saw the angel which had visited me in Ḥirāʾ [earlier]. He was sitting on a *kursī* (seat, chair, throne) between the heaven and the earth. I fell on my knees out of fear. I returned home and said, "Wrap me up in a cloak! Wrap me up in a cloak!" Then, these verses were revealed to me: *O you wrapped in thy cloak!… and keep away from all impurity* (74:1-5)."'[1]

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Ṭayālisī, ʿAbd al-Razzāq, Aḥmad,

Author's comment: This narration contradicts other accounts which say that Sūrah al-ʿAlaq (Chapter 96) was the first chapter that was revealed of the Qur'an. That view is more commensurate with the context of Chapter 96. Moreover, "the angel which had visited me in Ḥirāʾ" suggests that the Prophet had received revelation prior to that..

(2) Abū Hurayrah said: We [Companions] asked, "O Messenger of God! What shall we say when we start the prayer (*ṣalāh*)?" Then God revealed the verse: *Magnify your Lord* (74:3). So the Messenger of God instructed us to begin the prayer with *takbīr* (saying *Allāh akbār*).[1]

Author's comment: There is a problem with this narration. Abū Hurayrah converted to Islam quite some time following the Prophet's migration to Medina, while this sūrah was revealed at the beginning of the Prophet's mission. Where was Abū Hurayrah—and the other Companions—at that time?!

(3) Imam ʿAlī said: Tucking up a dress is a means of purifying it. God says: *and purify your garment* (74:4), which means tuck it up.[2]

(4) Jābir says: "I heard the Messenger of God reciting the verse, *and keep away from all impurity* (al-rujz or al-rajz) (74:5) with *rajz* [instead of *rujz*]." He said: "*Rajz* means idols."[3]

Author's comment: The last part is either by Jābir, or by another transmitter in the chain of narration [not by the Prophet].

(5) Concerning *And show not favor, thinking it is much* (74:6) Abū Jārūd said [narrating from Imam al-Bāqir]: Do not give something, wanting more in return.[4]

ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn al-Ḍurays, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Mardawayh, and Ibn al-Anbārī's *al-Maṣāḥif*.

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh.

2 *Al-Khiṣāl*, part of the hadith of 400. The same idea is found in a number of other narrations, from Imams al-Bāqir, al-Ṣādiq and al-Kāẓim, in *al-Kāfī* and *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Ḥākim (who has authenticated it) and Ibn Mardawayh.

4 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.

Verses 8-31

فَإِذا نُقِرَ فِي النَّاقُورِ ﴿٨﴾ فَذلِكَ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَوْمٌ عَسِيرٌ ﴿٩﴾ عَلَى الْكافِرِينَ غَيْرُ يَسِيرٍ ﴿١٠﴾
ذَرْنِي وَ مَنْ خَلَقْتُ وَحِيداً ﴿١١﴾ وَ جَعَلْتُ لَهُ مالاً مَمْدُوداً ﴿١٢﴾ وَ بَنِينَ شُهُوداً ﴿١٣﴾ وَ
مَهَّدْتُ لَهُ تَمْهِيداً ﴿١٤﴾ ثُمَّ يَطْمَعُ أَنْ أَزِيدَ ﴿١٥﴾ كَلاَّ إِنَّهُ كانَ لِآياتِنا عَنِيداً ﴿١٦﴾
سَأُرْهِقُهُ صَعُوداً ﴿١٧﴾ إِنَّهُ فَكَّرَ وَ قَدَّرَ ﴿١٨﴾ فَقُتِلَ كَيْفَ قَدَّرَ ﴿١٩﴾ ثُمَّ قُتِلَ كَيْفَ قَدَّرَ
﴿٢٠﴾ ثُمَّ نَظَرَ ﴿٢١﴾ ثُمَّ عَبَسَ وَ بَسَرَ ﴿٢٢﴾ ثُمَّ أَدْبَرَ وَ اسْتَكْبَرَ ﴿٢٣﴾ فَقالَ إِنْ هذا إِلاَّ سِحْرٌ
يُؤْثَرُ ﴿٢٤﴾ إِنْ هذا إِلاَّ قَوْلُ الْبَشَرِ ﴿٢٥﴾ سَأُصْلِيهِ سَقَرَ ﴿٢٦﴾ وَ ما أَدْراكَ ما سَقَرُ ﴿٢٧﴾ لا
تُبْقِي وَ لا تَذَرُ ﴿٢٨﴾ لَوَّاحَةٌ لِلْبَشَرِ ﴿٢٩﴾ عَلَيْها تِسْعَةَ عَشَرَ ﴿٣٠﴾ وَ ما جَعَلْنا أَصْحابَ
النَّارِ إِلاَّ مَلائِكَةً وَ ما جَعَلْنا عِدَّتَهُمْ إِلاَّ فِتْنَةً لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِيَسْتَيْقِنَ الَّذِينَ
أُوتُوا الْكِتابَ وَ يَزْدادَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِيماناً وَ لا يَرْتابَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتابَ وَ
الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَ لِيَقُولَ الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ وَ الْكافِرُونَ ما ذا أَرادَ اللَّهُ بِهذا مَثَلاً
كَذلِكَ يُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَشاءُ وَ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشاءُ وَ ما يَعْلَمُ جُنُودَ رَبِّكَ إِلاَّ هُوَ وَ
ما هِيَ إِلاَّ ذِكْرى لِلْبَشَرِ ﴿٣١﴾

(74:8) *When the Trumpet will be sounded,*
(74:9) *then that day of it will be a difficult day,*
(74:10) *not at all easy for the disbelievers.*
(74:11) *Leave Me* [to deal] *with him whom I created alone,*
(74:12) *and furnished him with abundant wealth,*
(74:13) *and sons abiding in his presence.*
(74:14) *And I prepared for him such preparation.*
(74:15) *Yet he desires that I should give more.*
(74:16) *Nay! For he has been hostile to Our signs.*
(74:17) *Soon I will overwhelm him with hardship.*
(74:18) *Indeed he reflected and appraised.*
(74:19) *Perish he, the way he appraised!*

(74:20) *Again, perish he! The way he appraised!*
(74:21) *Then he looked,*
(74:22) *Then he frowned and scowled.*
(74:23) *Then he walked away disdainfully.*
(74:24) *Thus he said: "This is nothing but magic handed down.*
(74:25) *This is only the speech of a mortal."*
(74:26) *Him shall I soon fling into Saqar.*
(74:27) *Ah, and what do you know of Saqar?*
(74:28) *It neither spares, nor leaves* [anything].
(74:29) *It discolors the skins.*
(74:30) *There are nineteen [keepers] over it.*
(74:31) *We have assigned only angels as keepers of the fire, and We have made their number merely a stumbling block for the faithless, and that those who were given the Book may be reassured, and the faithful may increase in [their] faith, and that those who were given the Book and the faithful may not doubt, and that those in whose hearts is a disease may say, and the faithless [along with them], "What did Allah mean by this description?" Thus does Allah lead astray whomever He wills, and guides whomever He wills. No one knows the hosts of your Lord except Him, and it is just an admonition for all humans.*

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Introduction & Commentary

These verses severely warn those who ridicule the Qur'an, allege it to be sorcery, and ridicule its truths.

فَإِذَا نُقِرَ فِي النَّاقُورِ ﴿٨﴾

(74:8) *When the Trumpet* (al-nāqūr) *will be sounded* (nuqira, from naqr),

Naqr is synonymous with *qarᶜ* (striking, hitting, beating). *Nāqūr* means "an instrument that is struck to make a sound." Striking the *nāqūr* is the like blowing into the *ṣūr* (trumpet). Both are expressions for raising the dead back to life, and summoning them for judgment on the Day of Resurrection. The verse introduces a conditional statement, where the initial clause (called the protasis) is mentioned here, and the concluding clause (called the apodosis) comes in the next verse: *then that day of it…* (74:9).

فَذٰلِكَ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَوْمٌ عَسِيرٌ ۝٩ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ غَيْرُ يَسِيرٍ ۝١٠

(74:9-10) ***then that day of it*** (**yawmaʾidh**) ***will be a difficult day, not at all easy for the disbelievers.***

The demonstrative pronoun "that" refers to the time when the trumpet will be sounded. *That day of it* apparently means the day all beings return to God, or the day when the disbelievers will be taken to God for reckoning and retribution. The word *yawmaʾidh* (day of, thereof) serves as a temporal container (*ẓarf*) for the sounding of the trumpet. That is, it identifies the time when the trumpet will be blown.[1]

The meaning is: "Then the time of sounding the Trumpet—which occurs when the people return to God—will be a hard day on the disbelievers." Or alternatively: "The time of sounding the Trumpet will be a difficult time for the disbelievers, on the day when the people return to God." The first meaning is based on *yawmaʾidh* being a container for "that" at the beginning of the verse. The second meaning is based on *yawmaʾidh* being a container for *a difficult day*.[2]

not at all easy…: This is a second adjective for the word *day* (74:9). This verse serves to emphasize the hardship of that day: it will be a difficult day in all aspects, not just one.[3]

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1 This means that a segment of time is used as a container for some parts of it, which is permissible, like using the year as a container for the month, and the month as a container for the day. Such usage is done when the two segments are viewed in different lights, or the same segment is differentiated based on its different qualities and the different events that occur in it. Therefore, one aspect of a time period can be taken as a container for another aspect of the same time period, based on what properties are highlighted in each. (Auth.)

2 Put more simply, the first meaning is: "That day of return will be a difficult day." The second meaning is: "That will be a difficult day thereof." Both are effectively the same. (Trans.)

3 *Al-Kashshāf* says: The implicit *idhā* (when) in *yawmaʾidh* is *manṣūb* in terms of inflection, indicating the accusative case. One may raise two questions here: (1) How is the accusative case justifiable here? (2) How can *yawmaʾidh* be a container for *a difficult day*? The answers are:
(1) The word *yawmaʾidh* (day of) introduces the complement or apodosis to the conditional statement. The effective meaning is: "When the Trumpet shall

ذَرْنِي وَ مَنْ خَلَقْتُ وَحِيداً ﴿١١﴾

(74:11) ***Leave Me [to deal] with him whom I created alone*** **(waḥīdan).**

This is an expression of threat. These verses—up to verse 74:31—were revealed with reference to Walīd b. al-Mughīrah, according to *mustafiḍah* (multiple, diffused, numerous) narrations. We shall discuss his story in our subsequent examination of the narrations, by God's will.

The word *waḥīdan* serves as a *ḥāl* (circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase, adverb) for the subject of the verb *khalaqtu* (I created).[1] The effective meaning is: "Leave me to deal with someone that I created while I was alone, unassisted by anyone else when creating him. I planned and directed his affairs in the best possible manner. So do not intervene between Me and him, for indeed I shall suffice him."

Other suggested possibilities are:

(1) *Waḥīdan* serves as a *ḥāl* for the object of the verb *dharnī* (leave Me.)[2]

(2) It serves as a *ḥāl* for the object of the verb *khalaqtu* (I created), which means that it describes the word *whom*. The meaning would be: "Leave Me with him whom I created while he was alone, without any wealth or children."

(3) *Waḥīdan* is an object of an omitted verb "criticize."[3]

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be sounded, things will get hard on the disbelievers."

(2) The word *yawmaʾidh* implies: "That will be *a time of* sounding the Trumpet and the unfolding of the difficult day." This is because the Day of Resurrection will occur *when* the Trumpet will be sounded.

The word *yawmaʾidh* can also be considered *marfūʿ* in terms of its role, assuming that it is a *badal* (apposition, replacement, interpretation) for the demonstrative pronoun "that." Then its predicate would be the second half of the verse: *will be a difficult day*. The effective meaning would be: "The day of sounding of the Trumpet will be a difficult day." (Auth.)

1 *Ḥāl* implies the meaning of "while," describing the condition of either the subject or object of a verb. It means "while the subject was…" or "while the object was…" (Trans.)

2 The meaning would be: "Leave Me alone with him." (Trans.)

3 The meaning would be: "Leave me with him whom I created, so that I may criticize him alone." (Trans.)

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Comment: Our interpretation above is the most plausible.

وَ جَعَلْتُ لَهُ مالاً مَمْدُوداً ﴿١٢﴾

(74:12) ***and furnished him with abundant*** **(mamdūdan)** ***wealth,***

There are two possible interpretations for *mamdūd*: (1) abundant and profuse; (2) extended through proliferation [over time].

وَ بَنِينَ شُهُوداً ﴿١٣﴾

(74:13) ***and sons abiding in his presence.***

His children were present with him. He could see them and seek their help. The conjunction "and" connects to the word *wealth* in the last verse.

وَ مَهَّدْتُ لَهُ تَمْهِيداً ﴿١٤﴾

(74:14) ***And I prepared for him such preparation*** **(tamhīdan).**

Tamhīd is synonymous with *tahyiʾah* (preparing, providing, smoothening, organizing). It is also used metaphorically for providing one with wealth and power, and taking care of their affairs.

ثُمَّ يَطْمَعُ أَنْ أَزِيدَ ﴿١٥﴾

(74:15) ***Yet he desires that I should give more.***

He still expects that I should give him more wealth, children and facilities than what I have already given him.

كَلاَّ إِنَّهُ كانَ لِآياتِنا عَنِيداً ﴿١٦﴾

(74:16) ***Nay*** **(kallā)*****! For he has been hostile*** **(ʿanīdan)** ***to Our signs.***

The exclamation *kallā* (nay, never, no way) serves to reject the person's expectation. Then the subsequent part of the verse explains and justifies this rejection. *ʿAnīd* is "an opponent who takes pride in their opposition."[1] It is said that following the revelation of these verses, Walīd started to gradually lose his wealth and children, until he finally died.

سَأُرْهِقُهُ صَعُوداً ﴿١٧﴾

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1 That is, someone who openly and defianty opposes someone or something. (Trans.)

(74:17) ***Soon I will overwhelm him*** **(sa-urhiquhū, from irhāq)** ***with hardship*** **(ṣaʿūdan).**

Irhāq means "covering something with force." *Ṣaʿūd* means "an arduous mountain pass." The verse compares his painful punishment to being forced over a toilsome hurdle and a difficult climb."

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إِنَّهُ فَكَّرَ وَ قَدَّرَ ﴿١٨﴾

(74:18) ***Indeed he reflected*** **(fakkara, from tafkīr)** ***and appraised*** **(qaddara, from taqdīr).**

The meaning of *tafkīr* is well known (to think, to contemplate, to meditate). *Taqdīr* (to measure, to assess, to determine) when used with *tafkīr*, means organizing the concepts and arguments in one's mind, and rearranging them in order to draw a desired conclusion. The subject of discussion in these verses [Walīd] wanted to say something about the Qur'an which would refute its mission, in order to satisfy his fellow opponents of the Prophet. Thus he started contemplating whether he should call it a poetry, a soothsaying, a delirium arising from lunacy, or a myth. Finally he determined to call it a sorcery that is spoken by a mortal, because it creates discord between a person and their spouse, children and friends.

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فَقُتِلَ كَيْفَ قَدَّرَ ﴿١٩﴾

(74:19) ***Perish he, the way he appraised!***

This is a curse on him, given the verse's context.

ثُمَّ قُتِلَ كَيْفَ قَدَّرَ ﴿٢٠﴾

(74:20) ***Again, perish he! The way he appraised!***

This verse repeats and emphasizes the curse in the last verse.

ثُمَّ نَظَرَ ﴿٢١﴾

(74:21) ***Then he looked.***

This verse and the next four [up to verse 74:25] present a very elegant and eloquent image of Walīd's attitude after his reflection and appraisal. He looked into the matter about which he was asked to offer his view. This is what is understood from the context of the imagery in these verses.[1]

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1 In other words, "looking" here means viewing the different dimensions of

ثُمَّ عَبَسَ وَ بَسَرَ ﴿٢٢﴾

(74:22) *Then he frowned* (ʿabasa, from ʿubūs) *and scowled* (basara, from busūr).

ʿUbūs means "frowning, scrunching up one's face." *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says:

> The verb is used as *ʿabasa yaʿbisu ʿubūsan*, and it means "frowning and scowling." It is synonymous with *taklīḥ* and *taqṭīb* (to be gloomy, to pout). They are antonymous to *ṭalāqah* and *bashāshah* (cheerfulness, affability, agreeableness). *Busūr* is used when signs of displeasure appear in one's face.

The meaning is: "After looking, he contracted his face and signs of dissatisfaction appeared in his expression."[1]

ثُمَّ أَدْبَرَ وَ اسْتَكْبَرَ ﴿٢٣﴾

(74:23) *Then he walked away* (adbara, from id*bār) disdainfully* (istakbara, from istikbār).

Idbār means "turning away from something." *Istikbār* means "refraining from something out of arrogance and defiance." These two are inner psychological states. Yet, they are mentioned in the imagery of the verses in a sequence after looking, frowning and scowling [74:21-22], which are visible physical states. The two qualities of Walīd described in this verse were also observable through his speech, mentioned in the next verse: *This is nothing but magic…* (74:24) That is why the next verse starts with the letter *fāʾ* (so, thus, therefore) instead of the word *thumma* (then, thereafter, also).[2]

فَقَالَ إِنْ هذا إِلاَّ سِحْرٌ يُؤْثَرُ ﴿٢٤﴾

(74:24) *Thus he said: "This is nothing but magic handed down.*

Consequently, he manifested his aversion and disdain [74:23] by

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something before offering one's opinion about it. (Trans.)

1 This is evocative of the Biblical expression, "his countenance fell," which is used to reflect a sense of dejection and/or anger in Cain (Genesis 4:5) and in the wealthy man (Mark 10:22). (Trans.)

2 In other words, the letter *fāʾ* at the beginning of the next verse serves to interpret and depict the two qualities mentioned in this verse. (Trans.)

making this statement. The demonstrative pronoun "this" refers to the Qur'an. *Handed down* means narrated and learnt from the magicians.

إِنْ هذا إِلاَّ قَوْلُ الْبَشَرِ ﴿٢٥﴾

(74:25) ***This is only the speech of a mortal."***

That is, contrary to Muḥammad's claim, the Qur'an is not the word of God. Some exegetes have said that the verse does not begin with "and" because it effectively reiterates the last verse. Both verses convey the same idea that the Qur'an is not the speech of God, although they are expressed differently.

سَأُصْلِيهِ سَقَرَ ﴿٢٦﴾

(74:26) ***Him shall I soon fling into*** **(sa-uṣlīhi)** ***Saqar.***

Uṣlīhi means "I will take him there; I will make him enter therein." *Saqar* is one of the names of hell in the Qur'an, or one of its levels. This verse is either a *bayān* (description, interpretation) or a *badal* (alternative expression, substitute, apposition) for the verse: *Soon I will overwhelm him with hardship* (74:17).[1]

وَ ما أَدْراكَ ما سَقَرُ ﴿٢٧﴾

(74:27) ***Ah, and what do you know of Saqar?***

This verse emphasizes the greatness and gravity of *Saqar*.

لا تُبْقِي وَ لا تَذَرُ ﴿٢٨﴾

(74:28) ***It neither spares, nor leaves [anything].***

This is an absolute negation, which conveys two points: (1) *Saqar* burns anything that it reaches. (2) *Saqar* reaches everyone that is cast into it. This is contrary to the fire of this world, which does not burn some of the things that are cast into it; and also does not affect every part and aspect of the things that it consumes. For instance, if it burns a person, it burns their body, but leaves out their soul and their spiritual qualities. *Saqar*, on the other hand, does not spare anyone who is flung into it, as God says: *It calls him who turned back [from the truth] and forsook [it]*

1 Either way the meaning is the same: the current verse interprets and clarifies verse 74:17. (Trans.)

(70:17). Furthermore, when it burns a person, it does not leave out any part of their soul or spirit, as God says: *[It is] the fire of Allah, kindled, which will overspread the hearts* (104:6-7).

Another possible meaning is that *Saqar* will neither spare them to be alive, nor will it leave them to die. Then the verse would be comparable to the verse: *he who will enter the great fire, then he will neither live in it, nor die* (87:12-13).[1]

Exegetes have suggested other interpretations for the verse, including: (1) *Saqar* will destroy anything that is cast into it. Then it does not leave them annihilated, but brings them back to be punished again. (2) It neither spares them any flesh, nor leaves them any bones.

لَوَّاحَةٌ لِّلْبَشَرِ ﴿٢٩﴾

(74:29) *It discolors* (lawwāḥah) *the skins* (lil-bashar).

Lawwāḥah is derived from *talwīḥ*, which means "blackening." Some have defined it as "reddening." *Bashar* is the plural of *basharah*, which means "outer skin."

عَلَيْهَا تِسْعَةَ عَشَرَ ﴿٣٠﴾

(74:30) *There are nineteen [keepers] over it.*

There will be nineteen guards in charge of the punishment of the sinners. This verse does not specify whether they are angels or other beings, but we can deduce from the next verse and the other verses about the hereafter that they will indeed be angels.

Some exegetes have asserted that the word "angel" is implied in this verse, as a *tamyīz* (specification, discrimination, clarification) for *nineteen*.[2] Then they have added:

> This is how the native Arabs understood the verse. It is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās that when this verse— *There are nineteen over it* (74:30)—was revealed, Abū Jahl said to the Quraysh, "May your

1 Another similar verse is: *Whoever comes to his Lord laden with guilt, indeed for him shall be hell where he will neither live nor die* (20:74). (Trans.)

2 A *tamyīz* is a noun that clarifies the "units" of a quantity. It is commonly added or implied after a number. The meaning here would be: "There are nineteen *angels* over it," where the word "angels" is an omitted *tamyīz*. (Trans.)

> mothers mourn for your death! I hear the son of Abī Kabshah[1] telling you that the keepers of fire will be nineteen. But you are a large crowd. Can't each ten of you take on one man of them?" A very brave man among them, Abū al-Ashadd [or Abū al-Asad] b. Asīd b. Kaladah al-Jumaḥī, said, "I will cover seventeen of them for you! You take care of the other two."

As the reader can see, there is no evidence in the above account to support the suggested view [that the word "angel" is understood from the verse]. Rather, the account refers each keeper as a "man" (*rajul*), which is not applicable to angels, particularly in the worldview of the polytheists, as described in the Qur'an: *And they have made the angels—who are servants of the All-Merciful—females* (43:19).

وَ ما جَعَلْنا أَصْحابَ النَّارِ إِلاَّ مَلائِكَةً وَ ما جَعَلْنا عِدَّتَهُمْ إِلاَّ فِتْنَةً لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِيَسْتَيْقِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتابَ وَ يَزْدادَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِيماناً وَ لا يَرْتابَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتابَ وَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَ لِيَقُولَ الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ وَ الْكافِرُونَ ما ذا أَرادَ اللَّهُ بِهذا مَثَلاً كَذلِكَ يُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَشاءُ وَ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشاءُ وَ ما يَعْلَمُ جُنُودَ رَبِّكَ إِلاَّ هُوَ وَ ما هِيَ إِلاَّ ذِكْرى لِلْبَشَرِ ﴿٣١﴾

(74:31) ***We have assigned only angels as keepers of the fire, and We have made their number merely a stumbling block for the faithless, and that those who were given the Book may be reassured, and the faithful may increase in [their] faith, and that those who were given the Book and the faithful may not doubt, and that those in whose hearts is a disease may say, and the faithless [along with them], "What did Allah mean by this description?" Thus does Allah lead astray whomever He wills, and guides whomever He wills. No one knows the hosts of your Lord except Him, and it is just an admonition for all humans.***

The theme and context of the verse shows that there was some conversation among the audience following the last verse about the number

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1 Abū Kabshah was a man from Khuzāʿah tribe who contravened from the Quraysh's custom of idolatry, and instead worshiped Sirius. The polytheists pejoratively compared the Prophet with him since he also opposed their idolatry. See al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs*, under *k-b-sh*. (Trans.)

of the guards of hell. That is why this verse was revealed [to answer their claims and clarify their misconceptions]. This is also supported by the cause of revelation (*sabab al-nuzul*) of the verse, as we shall see in our upcoming examination of the narrations.

We have assigned only angels as keepers of the fire…: The word used here is *aṣḥāb* (companions, masters, mates, owner). What is meant here is the guards who are authorized over hell and are in charge of punishing the sinners there. This can be deduced from the last verse: *There are nineteen [keepers] over it* (74:30), as well as what comes next: *and We have made their number merely a stumbling block…*[1]

The effective meaning is: "We have made the keepers to be angels who are capable of executing whatever they are commanded." The Qur'an says: *over which are [assigned] angels, severe and mighty, who do not disobey whatever Allah has commanded them, and carry out what they are commanded* (66:6). Therefore, the keepers of hell are not humans so that the sinners may possibly be able to defeat or resist.

… and We have made* (ja'alnā, from ja'l) *their number merely a stumbling block* (fitnah) *for the faithless…: *Fitnah* means "test, trial." It is said that the word *ja'l* (making) in this verse means "making an announcement about something," not "bringing something to existence." The meaning is: "We stated that they are nineteen in number only to test the disbelievers." This [interpretation of *ja'l*] is confirmed by the next part of the verse: *and that those who were given the Book may be reassured…*

***… and that those who were given the Book may be reassured* (li-yastayqina, from istīqān)…:** *Istīqān* means "finding certainty in one's heart." The meaning is: "This is so that the People of the Book would ascertain that the Qur'an which is revealed to you is a true message, since the number of the keepers of the fire mentioned here is in accord with their scriptures."

… and the faithful may increase in [their] faith…: That would occr when they observe the confirmation of the People of the Book.

… and that those in whose hearts is a disease may say* (li-yaqūla), *and the faithless [along with them], "What did Allah mean by this

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1 In verse 74:30, the word *'alá* (over, upon) indicates superiority and supervision. And the subsequent statement in the verse shows that the *aṣḥāb* of the fire are the same nineteen keepers mentioned in the last verse. (Trans.)

description?"…: Their statement—*"What did Allah mean by this description?"*—is pejorative and derisive, which makes it an expression of disbelief (*kufr*). This part of the verse certainly does not describe a direct and primary objective of God. In other words, the letter *lām* (that, so that, in order to) in *li-yaqūla* indicates the final outcome and consequence (*ʿāqibah*) of the act, as opposed to the letter *lām* in *li-yastayqina* (that they may be reassured), which indicates the objective and purpose (*ghāyah*) of the act or its agent as a justification for it. The People of the Book's reassurance and certainty amounts to faith (*īmān*), which can be a goal of a divine act. Perhaps the reason why the letter *lām* is repeated here is to indicate that it is used in two different senses.

… those in whose hearts is a disease …: Disease has been interpreted as doubt and denial. The group mentioned here has been matched with the hypocrites. *The faithless*, on the other hand, have been interpreted as those who openly express their disbelief, including the polytheists and others.

… "What did Allah mean by this description* (mathalan)*?"…: They made this statement out of contempt and derision. The demonstrative pronoun "this" refers to the verse: *There are nineteen [keepers] over it* (74:30). *Mathal* means "description, property." The meaning is: "What does God mean by describing the guardians of hell as being nineteen? How can such a small number punish the majority of the jinn and humans?"

… Thus* (kadhālika) *does Allah lead astray whomever He wills, and guides whomever He wills…: The word *kadhālika* (thus) refers to: *and We have made their number merely a stumbling block*.

… No one knows the hosts of your Lord except Him…: *The hosts of your Lord* are the fierce beings [that is, angels] which serve as God's intermediaries in executing His commands. Since this statement is made in an unconditional sense, what is restricted to God is not only the knowledge of their *number*. Rather, it includes any knowledge of them whatsoever, including their reality, their properties, their number, their actions, and the subtle wisdoms surrounding their creation. All that knowledge exclusively belongs to God, and is not shared by anyone else. Therefore, no one is in a position to state that their number is small or large, or to disparage their characteristics, because everyone is ignorant about them.

… and it* (hiya) *is just an admonition* (dhikrá) *for all humans: We can deduce from this statement that the Qur'an's teachings are addressed to, and intended for, all humankind. The pronoun "it" refers to the statement:

There are nineteen [keepers] over it (74:30). The feminine form of this pronoun is in accordance with the predicate of the statement.[1] The meaning is: "Human knowledge falls short of knowing anything about the hosts of your Lord. And if We informed you that the keepers of hell are nineteen in number, it is only meant as an admonition for them so that they may be awakened."

Other suggestions for the antecedent of the pronoun "it" are:

(1) The hosts of your Lord.
(2) *Saqar*.
(3) The entire sūrah.
(4) Worldly fire.

Comment: The last view is the least plausible.

A Discussion on Hypocrisy

Some exegetes have said:

> Assuming that this entire sūrah was revealed in Mecca, and that hypocrisy appeared after the Prophet's migration to Medina, it follows that what is mentioned here—*and that those in whose hearts is a disease may say…*—is a miraculous forecast about the future.

The first assumption—that the entire sūrah was revealed in Mecca—is a matter of consensus among the exegetes. It is narrated from Muqātil that the current verse—*We have assigned only angels as keepers of the fire…* (74:31)—was revealed in Medina, but the authenticity of that narration is questionable. Granted that he did say so, it is what he deduced from the mention of hypocrisy in the verse, based on the assumption that hypocrisy appeared in Medina.[2]

The second assumption—that hypocrisy emerged only after the Prophet's migration to Medina—has been insisted and emphasized by some exegetes. Their argument is:

> Prior to the migration, the Prophet and the Muslims did not have sufficient power, influence and means to pose any threat to the people, or to tempt them with some gain. People had no incentive to make a false pretence of faith in Mecca—either to guard

1 The word *dhikrá* (reminder, remembrance, admonition) is feminine. (Trans.)

2 In other words, what is narrated from him is an interpretation, not a historical report. (Trans.)

themselves against some danger, or to be admitted to the Muslim community. The case in Medina, however, was different.

The above argument is flawed, as we discussed in our discussion on hypocrisy in Chapter 63 (Sūrah al-Munāfiqūn). The motives for hypocrisy were not limited to fear, safeguarding against a loss, or securing an immediate gain. There were other possible grounds for hypocrisy, including: (1) making a gain in the long run; (2) bigotry and tribal affiliation; (3) maintaining a deeply rooted habit [of polytheism and unbelief].[1] There is no evidence to state that these factors were completely absent in all of those who believed in the Prophet in Mecca prior to the migration. In fact, there are accounts about some people believing in Islam but then reverting to disbelief, and others who first believed with doubts in their hearts but later became steadfast in their faith.

In addition, the Qur'an says: *Among the people there are those who say, "We have faith in Allah," but if such a one is tormented in Allah's cause, he takes persecution by the people for Allah's punishment. Yet if there comes any help from your Lord, they will say for sure, "We were indeed with you." Does not Allah know best what is in the breasts of the creatures? Allah shall surely ascertain those who have faith, and He shall surely ascertain the hypocrites* (29:10-11). These two verses are in Sūrah al-ʿAnkabūt, which was revealed in Mecca. They clearly speak about the existence of hypocrisy in Mecca. Talking about being *tormented in Allah's cause* and *persecution by the people* (29:10) is a clear indication that the two verses were revealed in Mecca, since such persecution and torment in the cause of God did not occur in Medina. It should also be noted that *help from your Lord* (29:10) does not show that the verses are Medinan, because God's help can take a variety of forms and applications other than immediate victory. It is possible that these verses [29:10-11] pertain to Muslims who were persecuted in Mecca after the Prophet's migration to Medina. This does not refute our view [that hypocrisy existed before the migration], because the persecuted Muslims were those who had converted to Islam prior to the Prophet's migration, even though they continued to be persecuted after the migration.

Elsewhere the Qur'an says: *And among the people are those who worship*

1 The last point is about one's lifelong conditioning due to their idolatrous upbringing; a luggage of polytheistic orientations that one likely carries with oneself, often subconsciously, despite embracing Islam. (Trans.)

Allah on the [very] fringe: if good fortune befalls him, he is content with it; but if an ordeal (fitnah) *visits him he makes a turnabout* (22:11). This verse also describes the same hypocritical attitude, assuming that the word *fitnah* means punishment and persecution—although Chapter 22 was revealed in Medina.[1]

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Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning *When the Trumpet will be sounded… alone* (74:8-11) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: These verses were revealed about Walīd b. Mughīrah, who was an experienced and wise old man among the Arabs. He was among those who ridiculed the Messenger of God. The Messenger of God used to sit in the Ḥijr [of Ismāʿīl] and recite the Qur'an [for the people]. Once the Quraysh circled Walīd b. Mughīrah and asked him, "Abū ʿAbd Shams! What is this that Muḥammad is saying? Is it poetry, soothsaying, or sermon?"
"I shall first hear what he says," he replied.
He approached the Messenger of God and said, "Muḥammad! Recite some of your poetry for me!"
"This isn't poetry," the Prophet calmly said, "but it is God's speech,

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1 While there are verses which suggest that hypocrisy existed in Mecca, it is highly doubtful that it existed in the *early years* of the Prophet's mission in Mecca. Chapter 29 was revealed slightly before the Prophet's migration to Medina, when Islam had gained popularity. A very insightful observation is that Medinan verses generally tend to be longer than Meccan verses. As with the Meccan chapters which have longer verses, or which were revealed at once—such as Chapter 6—they were revealed toward the end of the Prophet's stay in Mecca. As some thinkers have explained, it is as though the Prophet—and/or his audience—gradually developed a greater capacity to receive longer units of revelation. In this light, we can arguably say that verse 74:31 was most likely not revealed with the rest of the chapter at the outset of the Prophet's mission, but was revealed later, either in Mecca or Medina. The same can be said about verse 73:20, which bears clear indications of being revealed in a separate occasion from the rest of the surah, as supported by the author in his "Introduction" to the verse, and mentioned in hadith number 5 under verses 73:1-19. This possibility is also confirmed by the author's view that verses 74:32ff do not pertain to *Saqar*, but to the Qur'an. (Trans.)

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which He has chosen for His angels, prophets and messengers."[1]
Walīd demanded, "Recite some of it for me."
The Prophet started reciting Sūrah Fuṣṣilat for him. When he reached the verse, *But if they turn away, say: I warn you of a thunderbolt, like the thunderbolt of ʿĀd and Thamūd* (41:13), Walīd started trembling, and every hair on his head and face stood on end. He retreated to his house from there, instead of reconvening with the Quraysh.
The Quraysh resorted to Abū Jahl and said, "O Abā al-Ḥakam! Apparently Abū ʿAbd Shams has converted to Muḥammad's religion. Don't you see that he did not return to us?"
The next morning Abū Jahl went to Walīd and complained: "My uncle! You have embarrassed us and let us down by converting to Muḥammad's religion. You have given justification to our foes to reproach us."
"I haven't converted to his religion, "Walīd explained. "But I heard a very moving speech from him that sends shivers up one's spine."
"Would you say it is a sermon?" Abū Jahl inquired.
"No, because a sermon is a continuous thread of speech, while his words are scattered. Not all parts of it are comparable to one another."
"So is it poetry?"
"No. I have indeed heard all genre of Arabic poetry in every meter, including *basīṭ*, *madīd*, *raml* and *rajaz*. His speech is not poetry."
"What is it, then?"
Walīd replied, "Give me some time to think about it."
The next day the Quraysh asked him, "Abū ʿAbd Shams! What do you have to say concerning our inquiry?"
"Say that his speech is *siḥr* (magic, sorcery, bewitchment)," he replied, "since it enchants the hearts of people."
Thus God revealed to His Messenger, with reference to this story: *Leave Me [to deal] with him whom I created alone* (waḥīdan)

1 Two alternative versions are: (1) "It is God's speech, with which He has sent His angels…" (2) "It is God's speech, with which His angels, prophets and messengers are pleased." (Trans.)

(74:11). The verse calls Walīd *waḥīd* (alone) because he told the Quraysh, "I will alone pay for the cover of the Kaʿba one year, and you pay for it the next year all together." He had abundant wealth, many gardens, and ten sons in Mecca. He also had ten servants, each of whom was endowed a thousand dinars to trade for him. That was the definition of *qinṭār* at the time.[1] It is also said that *qinṭār* meant the hide of an ox filled with gold."

(2) Once Walīd b. Mughīrah went to the Prophet, who recited the Qur'an to him. That apparently softened his heart. When Abū Jahl heard about this, he went to Walīd and said, "My uncle! Your people [that is, the Quraysh tribe] want to raise some funds for you since you went to Muḥammad seeking some gain from him."

"Quraysh knows very well," Walīd replied, "that I am one of the most affluent of their members."

Abū Jahl said: "Make an announcement to your people which indicates that you are averse or [at least] disinclined to him [Muḥammad]."

"What should I say?" Walīd inquired. "By God! There is no one among you who is more knowledgeable than me about [Arabic] poetry, including all its genres and meters like *rajaz*, *qaṣīdah* and jinn poetry. But by God, his speech is not like any of these. By God! There is a sweetness and elegance to his speech. It is fruitful on the top, and abundant underneath. It surpasses [other speeches] but is not surpassed [by any speech]. It crushes everything under it.

Abū Jahl said, "Your people will not be satisfied with you unless you criticize it."

"Let me think about it," Walid replied.

After reflecting on it, he said: "This can only be some *magic handed down* (74:24). He has garnered it from others." Thus it was revealed: *Leave Me [to deal] with him whom I created alone* (74:11).[2]

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1 That is, a thousand gold coins. The word *qinṭār* is used in verses 3:14, 3:75, 4:20. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Ḥākim (who has authenticated it) and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Dalāʾil*, on the authority of ʿIkrimah, on the authority

(3) Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq said: *Waḥīd* (alone; in verse 74:11) means an illegitimate child.[1]

(4) Once a man from Banū Hishām [the descendants of Mughīrah] boasted in a sermon, "I am the son of *al-waḥīd*." When Imam al-Bāqir heard about this he said, "What a shame! He wouldn't take pride in it if he knew what it means." When he was asked about its meaning, the Imam explained: "It means someone whose father is unknown."[2]

(5) The Prophet said: *Ṣaʿūd* (hardship; in verse 74:17) is the name of a mountain in hell. It takes the disbelievers seventy years to climb it, then they fall off to its base.[3] They abide in that condition forever.[4]

(6) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *Then he frowned* (ʿabasa) (74:22): He scrunched up his face. *And scowled* (basara) (74:22): He distorted his mouth [or turned his face aside].[5]

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of Ibn ʿAbbās.

1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-ʿAyyāshī, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Zurārah, Ḥumrān and Muḥammad b. Muslim.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Zurārah.

3 Thus was the fate of Sisyphus. (Trans.)

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad, Ibn al-Mundhir, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā's *Ṣifat al-nār*, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn Ḥabbān, al-Ḥākim (who has authenticated it) and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Baʿth*, on the authority of Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī.

5 In other words, *ʿabasa* means contracting one's facial muscles as one frowns. *Basara* could mean either (1) pouting or extending one side of the mouth, as an expression of derision, frustration or contemplation; or (2) turning one's face aside as a sign of disdain and disregard. (Trans.)

Verses 32-48

كَلاَّ وَ الْقَمَرِ ﴿٣٢﴾ وَ اللَّيْلِ إِذْ أَدْبَرَ ﴿٣٣﴾ وَ الصُّبْحِ إِذا أَسْفَرَ ﴿٣٤﴾ إِنَّها لَإِحْدَى الْكُبَرِ ﴿٣٥﴾ نَذِيراً لِلْبَشَرِ ﴿٣٦﴾ لِمَنْ شاءَ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ يَتَقَدَّمَ أَوْ يَتَأَخَّرَ ﴿٣٧﴾ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِما كَسَبَتْ رَهِينَةٌ ﴿٣٨﴾ إِلاَّ أَصْحابَ الْيَمِينِ ﴿٣٩﴾ فِي جَنَّاتٍ يَتَساءَلُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾ عَنِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٤١﴾ ما سَلَكَكُمْ فِي سَقَرَ ﴿٤٢﴾ قالُوا لَمْ نَكُ مِنَ الْمُصَلِّينَ ﴿٤٣﴾ وَ لَمْ نَكُ نُطْعِمُ الْمِسْكِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾ وَ كُنَّا نَخُوضُ مَعَ الْخائِضِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾ وَ كُنَّا نُكَذِّبُ بِيَوْمِ الدِّينِ ﴿٤٦﴾ حَتَّى أَتانَا الْيَقِينُ ﴿٤٧﴾ فَما تَنْفَعُهُمْ شَفاعَةُ الشَّافِعِينَ ﴿٤٨﴾

(74:32) *Nay, by the Moon.*
(74:33) *And by the night when it recedes.*
(74:34) *And by the dawn when it shines forth.*
(74:35) *Indeed it is one of the greatest [signs]*
(74:36) *—a warning to all humans,*
(74:37) *[alike] for anyone among you who may wish to advance or to retreat.*
(74:38) *Every soul is a pledge for what it has earned,*
(74:39) *except the People of the Right Hand.*
(74:40) *[They will be] in gardens, questioning one another*
(74:41) *concerning the guilty:*
(74:42) *"What drew you into Saqar?"*
(74:43) *They will answer, "We were not among those who prayed.*
(74:44) *Nor did we feed the poor.*
(74:45) *We used to plunge [in vanity] with the plungers,*
(74:46) *And we used to deny the Day of Judgment,*
(74:47) *Until the inevitable came to us."*
(74:48) *So the intercession of the intercessors will not avail them.*

Introduction & Commentary

These verses exonerate the Qur'an from the abovementioned allegations. Contrary to their remarks, it is one of the greatest miracles and

communications of God, which is sent to warn all humankind. Adhering to it is sufficient to liberate one's soul from the bondage of one's deeds, which lead one toward hell.

كَلَّا وَ الْقَمَرِ ﴿٣٢﴾

(74:32) ***Nay, by the Moon.***

The exclamation *kallā* (nay, never, no way) rejects the preceding statements. *Al-Kashshāf* says:

> There are two possible interpretations for the rejection conveyed by *kallā*: (1) After saying that the Qur'an is *an admonition for all humans* (74:31), it qualifies the Qur'an's admonishing capacity for the disbelievers since they refuse to take heed. (2) It states that the Qur'an is indeed *a warning* (74:36), despite those who are not willing to admit that *it is one of the greatest [signs]* (74:35).

According to the first interpretation, *kallā* pertains to the previous verse. According to the second interpretation, it pertains to what is stated later. There is yet another view which we shall present below [under verse 74:35].

وَ اللَّيْلِ إِذْ أَدْبَرَ ﴿٣٣﴾ وَ الصُّبْحِ إِذا أَسْفَرَ ﴿٣٤﴾

(74:33-34) ***And by the night when it recedes*** **(adbara, from idbār).** ***And by the dawn when it shines forth*** **(asfara, from isfār).**

These verses list a series of vows. *Idbār* (receding, withdrawing, going away) is the opposite of *iqbāl* (approaching, arriving, coming up). *Isfār* means "appearing, becoming bright, lighting up."

إِنَّها لَإِحْدَى الْكُبَرِ ﴿٣٥﴾

(74:35) ***Indeed it*** **(innahā)** ***is one of the greatest*** **(al-kubar)** ***[signs]***

This verse is the complement of the vows in the last three verses. *Kubar* is the plural of *kubrá* (greater, greatest). The antecedent of the pronoun "it" is *Saqar* (74:26-27). The verse is saying that hell is one of the greatest torments and calamities, unmatched by any other form of suffering. This is a common expression; for instance, a man who is unrivalled by other men is called "one of *the* men" (*aḥad al-rijāl*). The meaning is: "I swear by these things that *Saqar* is indeed one of the greatest calamities—or rather, *the* greatest—which is meant to warn all humans."

The above is how the verse has been interpreted by many exegetes.

Yet, it is more plausible to say that the negation *kallā* (nay, never, no way) rejects Walīd's claims about the Qur'an: *"This is nothing but magic handed down. This is only the speech of a mortal"* (74:24-25). Accordingly, the antecedent of the pronoun "it" would be the Qur'an.[1] The meaning is: "The matter is not as he said. Rather, I swear by these things that the Qur'an—that is, the *verses* of the Qur'an—are among the greatest of divine signs, sent to warn all humans."[2]

Some exegetes have suggested that this verse serves to justify and explain the negation implied by *kallā* (74:32). The previous vows do not have a complement since they are stated to emphasize the negation. Alternatively, their complement is understood and implied by *kallā*.[3]

نَذِيراً لِلْبَشَرِ ﴿٣٦﴾

(74:36) *—a warning* (nadhīran) *to all humans,*

Nadhīr here is a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund), synonymous with *indhār* (warning). The meaning is: "It [the Qur'an, or *Saqar*] is great and tremendous while it is a warning."[4]

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1 The pronoun "it" (the ending *hā* in *innahā*) is feminine on the account that the Qur'an consists of verses (*āyāt*). It could also be in accordance with the predicate of the verse. (Auth.)
Āyāt is the plural of *āyah*, which is feminine. The predicate of the sentence—*is one of the greatest* (*la-iḥdá al-kubar*)—is also feminine. (Trans.)

2 The ambiguity about *Saqar—Ah, and what do you know of Saqar* (74:27)—is already clarified in verses 74:27-30. The author's interpretation is more plausible since the Qur'an is the very theme and focal point in Walīd's story above, and the ending verses of the chapter below. (Trans.)

3 The meaning would be: "Since these verses are among the greatest signs of God, it follows that the case is not, by any means whatsoever, as they have imagined." (Trans.)

4 *Nadhīran* (warning) is *manṣūb* in terms of inflection since it functions as a *tamyīz* (specification, discrimination, clarification). According to some exegetes, it functions as a *ḥāl* (circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase) for the subject of the last verse, as understood from the context. (Auth.)
The meaning above is based on *nadhīran* being a *ḥāl*. If it is a *tamyīz*, the meaning would be: "The Qur'an is one of the greatest—that is, greatest

There are some other suggested interpretations here, which are not worthy of discussion. Two of them are: (1) The verse describes the Prophet and connects to the beginning of the chapter. The implied meaning is: "*Rise up and warn* (74:2) as a warner to all humans." (2) The verse describes God.[1]

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لِمَنْ شاءَ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ يَتَقَدَّمَ أَوْ يَتَأَخَّرَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(74:37) [alike] *for anyone among you who may wish to advance* (yataqaddama, from taqaddum) *or to retreat* (yataʾakhkhara, from taʾakhkhur).

This verse shows the universality and breadth of the warning mentioned in the last verse. The clause, *Those of you* is a *badal* (apposition, replacement, interpretation) for *all humans* (74:36). *To advance or to retreat* is the object of "wishing" [in *who may wish*]. What is meant by *taqaddum* (stepping forward) is to follow the truth, which would manifest in the form of faith and obedience. *Taʾakhkhur* (withdrawing, postponing, deviating) means refusing to follow the truth, which would manifest in the form of disbelief and disobedience. The meaning is: "The Qur'an is a warner to everyone without exception, including those of you who wish to follow the truth, and those of you refrain from doing so."

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Another suggested interpretation is:

> *Taqaddum* means hastening toward good deeds, while *taʾakhkhur* means opting out of it. The verse's subject and predicate are stated in the opposite order. The subject is the clause, *to advance or to retreat*, which is *marfūʿ* in terms of its role. The predicate is *for anyone among you who may wish*. This is like the statement "It is up to one who makes ablution to pray."[2] The meaning is: "It is up to anyone who wishes to advance or to retreat, to do so." This makes the verse comparable to the verse: *let anyone who wills*

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warnings—to all humans." (Trans.)

1 The meaning would be: "God is a warner to all humans," where "God" is implied. (Trans.)

2 The order is reversed because the implied meaning is: "Praying is up to anyone who has made ablution." (Trans.)

believe it, and let anyone who wills disbelieve it (18:29).[1]

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِما كَسَبَتْ رَهِينَةٌ ﴿٣٨﴾

(74:38) *Every soul is a pledge for what* (bi-mā) *it has earned* (rahīnah),

There are three possible interpretations for the letter *bāʾ* (in *bi-mā*): (1) It means *maʿa* (with). (2) It indicates causality. (3) It indicates reciprocity.[2] *Rahīnah* is synonymous with *rahn* (hostage, pledge). This is based on what al-Zamakhsharī says in *al-Kashshāf*:

> The Qur'an says elsewhere: *Every man is a hostage* (rahīn) *to what he has earned* (52:21). One may imagine that the word *rahīnah* in the current verse is the feminine of *rahīn* in verse 52:21, which is made feminine since the word *nafs* (soul) is feminine. But that is not true, because *rahīn* is equally applicable to the masculine and the feminine. That is the case when the verbal pattern *faʿīl* [as in *rahīn*] conveys the meaning of the accusative case *mafʿūl* [in this case *marhūn*, meaning "that which is pledged and held hostage"]. Instead, *rahīnah* is a noun [not an adjective], which is synonymous with *rahn* (hostage, pledge). It can be compared with *shatīmah*, which is synonymous with the noun *shatm* (abuse, vilification).[3] The effective meaning is: "Every soul is a *rahn* (hostage, pledge) for what it has done."

Every soul is a pledge in the sense that God has a right over every soul, where everyone must fulfill their duty to God through faith and righteous deeds. Therefore, every soul is pledged, held and confined with God until they pay their due to Him. If they believe and act righteously, then they will be released and freed. If they disbelieve and sin—and die in such a state—then they will remain confined as a hostage forever. This

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1 The two meanings are similar, and both can be confirmed by verses 74:54-55 below. (Trans.)

2 The meanings would accordingly be: (1) "Every soul will be held hostage *next to* its deeds." (2) "Every soul will be hold hostage *because of* its deeds." (3) "Every soul will be hold hostage *in return for* its deeds." (Trans.)

3 In other words, *shatīmah* does not mean "abusive" but "abuse." Similarly, *rahīnah* does not mean "pledging" but "pledge." Gender would make a difference if the terms are interpreted as adjectives (like abusive and pledging), but not if they are interpreted as nouns (like abuse and pledge). (Trans.)

is a different sense from what is mentioned in the verse: *Every man is a hostage to what he has earned* (52:21). In that verse, hostage means being tied to one's deeds, in the sense that one's actions—whether good or evil—are inseparable from the actor.

This verse serves to explain the reason behind the universal meaning of the last two verses: *a warning to all humans, [alike] for anyone among you who may wish to advance or to retreat* (74:36-37). It is *because* every soul is a pledge to its deeds that everyone must guard themselves against the fire—which is where they shall be confined in case they sin and do not follow the truth.

إِلَّآ أَصۡحَابَ ٱلۡيَمِينِ ٣٩

(74:39) ***except the People of the Right Hand.***

These are the people who receive their records of deeds from the right side. They consist of the average believers who hold true beliefs and do righteous deeds. They are mentioned and described in a number of verses in the Qur'an with this epithet. Hence, the exception in the verse is a connected one.[1]

The exception and the excepted clause together convey that the souls which have earned something can be classified into two groups: (1) those who are held hostage to their deeds, which would be the souls of wrongdoers; (2) those who are freed and released from their pledge, which would be the souls of the People of the Right Hand. There remains a third group, called *al-sābiqūn* (the foremost ones) and *al-muqarrabūn* (those who are brought very near to God), whom are mentioned in some places in the Qur'an, such as: *you will be three groups… And the foremost ones are the foremost ones: they are the ones brought near [to Allah]* (56:7-11). They have reached the station of servitude, where they do not possess anything: neither their souls, nor the actions of their souls. Their souls and their actions belong to God. That is why they will not be summoned for the reckoning of deeds. God says: *So, they will indeed be arraigned [before*

1 A "connected exception" (*istithnāʾ muttaṣil*) is an ordinary exception, where what is excepted is a member of the original group. Its opposite is an "unconnected exception" (*istithnāʾ munqaṭiʿ*, *istithnāʾ munfaṣil*), where what is excepted is not a member of the original group. Such exceptions effectively convey two independent statements. (Trans.)

God]—[all] except Allah's exclusive servants (37:127-128). Accordingly, the third category is not part of the excepted clause to begin with.

Here are some other suggested interpretations for *the People of the Right Hand*:

(1) They are the angels.
(2) They are Muslim children [who die prematurely].
(3) They are those who stood on the right side of Adam on the Day of the Covenant [7:172].
(4) They are *those to whom there has gone beforehand [the promise of] the best reward from Us* (21:101).

Comment: These are clearly implausible views.

فِي جَنَّاتٍ يَتَساءَلُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾ عَنِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٤١﴾

(74:40-41) ***[They will be] in gardens, questioning one another concerning the guilty:***

in gardens (jannātin)…: This is a predicate for an omitted subject. The indeterminate form of *jannātin* indicates greatness and glorification. The implied meaning is: "They will be in gardens that are beyond description."[1]

… questioning one another concerning the guilty: Those in the gardens, as a whole, will be questioning the guilty, as a whole.

ما سَلَكَكُمْ فِي سَقَرَ ﴿٤٢﴾

(74:42) "What drew you* (salakakum) *into Saqar?"

What is meant by *salakakum* is: "What caused you to enter hell?" There are two possible interpretations for the function of this verse: (1) It is an interpretation of what their *questioning* [74:40]. (2) There is an implied verb "say" that is omitted here. The meaning is: "They will say: What drew you into Saqar?"

قالُوا لَمْ نَكُ مِنَ الْمُصَلِّينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

(74:43) ***They will answer, "We were not among those who prayed.***

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1 Another possibility is that this phrase serves as a *ḥāl* (circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase) for *the People of the Right Hand* (74:39). (Auth.)
The meaning would be: "Every soul will be held hostage except for the People of the Right Hand, who will instead be in gardens." (Trans.)

The antecedent of the pronoun "they" is *the guilty* (74:41). What is meant by "prayer" (*ṣalāh*) here is any specific ritual for turning one's attention to God in worship. This embraces all forms of prayer prescribed in different divine codes of law.

وَ لَمْ نَكُ نُطْعِمُ الْمِسْكِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾

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(74:44) ***Nor did we feed the poor.***

Feeding the poor means spending money on the needy members of the society to help them stand on their feet and meet their needs. Feeding the poor represents the fulfillment of people's right (*ḥaqq al-nās*), while prayer in the last verse represents fulfilling the rights of God (*ḥaqq Allāh*).

وَ كُنَّا نَخُوضُ مَعَ الْخَائِضِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾

(74:45) ***We used to plunge*** **(nakhūḍū, from khawḍ) [in vanity]** ***with the plungers,***

Khawḍ means "engagement and immersion in any inappropriate act or speech."

وَ كُنَّا نُكَذِّبُ بِيَوْمِ الدِّينِ ﴿٤٦﴾

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(74:46) ***And we used to deny the Day of Judgment,***

This verse refers to the Day of Retribution. A guilty soul is one who is prone to one or more of the four vices enumerated in these verses. Since the verses are a collective response by all the guilty, it is correct to attribute all of these four qualities to them as a group, even though not every individual among them may suffer from all four.

حَتَّى أَتَانَا الْيَقِينُ ﴿٤٧﴾

(74:47) ***Until the inevitable*** **(al-yaqīn)** ***came to us."***

This verse qualifies the denial mentioned in the last verse. *Al-yaqīn* (the inevitable, the certainty) has been interpreted as death, since it will undoubtedly occur. The meaning would be: "We continually denied the Day of Judgment until death overtook us and terminated our life in the world." In other words: "We denied the Day of Judgment throughout our lifetime."

Al-yaqīn has also been interpreted as the certitude that one attains by observing the signs of the hereafter and the realm of *barzakh* (the

intermediate realm between this life and the resurrection) at the time of death and after that. This is a plausible interpretation.

فَما تَنْفَعُهُمْ شَفاعَةُ الشّافِعِينَ ﴿٤٨﴾

(74:48) ***So the intercession of the intercessors will not avail them.***

In our previous discussion on intercession (*shafāʿah*),[1] we stated that according to this verse, there will be some intercessors who will intercede for others [on the Day of Resurrection], but the guilty will not benefit from their intercession since they fall short of its conditions. We also presented numerous narrations about intercession in the first volume of this book.[2]

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1 See volume 1, of the English translation, under verses 2:47-48. (Trans.)

2 See volume 1, of the English translation, under verses 2:47-48. (Trans.)

Verses 49-56

فَما لَهُمْ عَنِ التَّذْكِرَةِ مُعْرِضِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾ كَأَنَّهُمْ حُمُرٌ مُسْتَنْفِرَةٌ ﴿٥٠﴾ فَرَّتْ مِنْ قَسْوَرَةٍ ﴿٥١﴾
بَلْ يُرِيدُ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ مِنْهُمْ أَنْ يُؤْتى صُحُفاً مُنَشَّرَةً ﴿٥٢﴾ كَلاَّ بَلْ لا يَخافُونَ الْآخِرَةَ ﴿٥٣﴾
كَلاَّ إِنَّهُ تَذْكِرَةٌ ﴿٥٤﴾ فَمَنْ شاءَ ذَكَرَهُ ﴿٥٥﴾ وَ ما يَذْكُرُونَ إِلاَّ أَنْ يَشاءَ اللَّهُ هُوَ أَهْلُ
التَّقْوى وَ أَهْلُ الْمَغْفِرَةِ ﴿٥٦﴾

(74:49) *So what is the matter with them that they are averse to the Reminder*
(74:50) *as if they were terrified asses*
(74:51) *fleeing from a lion?*
(74:52) *Rather, every one of them desires to be given unrolled scriptures [from Allah]!*
(74:53) *Nay! Rather they fear not the hereafter.*
(74:54) *Nay! It is indeed a reminder.*
(74:55) *So let anyone who wills remember it.*
(74:56) *And they do not remember unless Allah wills. He is worthy of Godwariness, and worthy of forgiveness.*

Introduction & Commentary

These verses sum up the previous warnings in the chapter by expressing astonishment about their aversion to the Qur'anic admonitions and their evasion of such patent truth. It is as though the verses are saying: "Given the above, they must respond to the call of the truth and take heed through this reminder. It is thus surprising that they turn away from it. Rather, they do not believe in the message, but each of them desires to be given a scripture from God. By no means! Rather, it is because they do not believe in the hearafter; that is why they are not perturbed by these threats."

The verses then present them with the reminder, and give them the choice to either accept it or reject it. They may accept or reject it if they wish. Nevertheless, they must know that they are not independent in their wish. Their choice by no means limits God in His power. They would only

take heed by God's will. They are inevitably subject to God's rule of *qadar* (measurement, ordainment, predestination).

فَما لَهُمْ عَنِ التَّذْكِرَةِ مُعْرِضِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

(74:49) ***So what*** **(fa-mā)** ***is the matter with them (lahum) that they are averse*** **(muʿriḍīn)** ***to the Reminder***

The question in this verse is a rhetorical one which indicates surprise and astonishment. The word *lahum* (lit. for them) refers to an omitted verb *kāna* (to be, to occur). The implied meaning is: "What has transpired for them?"[1]

The meaning is: "Given what We said, what is the matter with the polytheists who deny the Qur'an's reminder while they evade it?" In other words: "It was incumbent on them to confirm the message and believe in it, but they turned away from it. That is strange."

كَأَنَّهُمْ حُمُرٌ مُسْتَنْفِرَةٌ ﴿٥٠﴾ فَرَّتْ مِنْ قَسْوَرَةٍ ﴿٥١﴾

(74:50-51) ***as if they were terrified*** **(mustanfirah, from istinfār)** ***asses*** **(ḥumur)** ***fleeing from a lion*** **(qaswarah)*?***

These two verses illustrate the disbelievers' aversion to the reminder through an analogy. *Ḥumur* is the plural of *ḥimār*, which means a wild ass in this verse. *Istinfār* means "to stampede, to flee." *Qaswarah* has been defined as both lion and hunter. The meaning is: "They are averse to the reminder as though they are wild asses escaping from a lion or a hunter."

بَلْ يُرِيدُ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ مِنْهُمْ أَنْ يُؤْتى صُحُفاً مُنَشَّرَةً ﴿٥٢﴾

(74:52) ***Rather*** **(bal)*, every one of them desires to be given unrolled scriptures [from Allah]!***

Unrolled scriptures means divinely revealed books that contain the message of truth. The word *bal* (rather, nay) indicates a substitution and

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1 The letter *fā*ʾ (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of the verse indicates that this statement is drawn as a conclusion to the previous discussion about reminder and admonition [74:31-37]. The word *muʿriḍīn* (averse) functions as a *ḥāl* (circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase) for the pronoun "them" (the ending *hum* in *lahum*). The clause, *To the Reminder* indicates their object of aversion. (Auth.)

correction to the previously mentioned aversion. The meaning is: "Their aversion to the reminder is not merely due to fear and panic, but every one of them wishes to be given a book from God that consists of the Qur'anic message."

This shows their arrogance and defiance toward God. It means that they would accept God's message and not turn away from it only if He calls them to it directly, and sends a separate scripture to each of them individually. Otherwise, if He were to call them to His message through a human messenger, then they would not accept it, despite being true and supported by manifest signs and miracles. In this sense, the verse can be compared with what is narrated from them elsewhere in the Qur'an: *We will not believe unless we are given the like of what was given to Allah's messengers* (6:124). Similarly, the previous nations told their messengers: *You are nothing but mortals like us* (14:10), which implies that no human being can be a divine messenger.

Some exegetes have suggested that the verse is comparable to another verse, where they addressed the Prophet: *And we will not believe your ascension until you bring down for us a book that we may read* (17:93). However, there is a difference between the two verses. The current verse implies that every single individual among them should receive an unrolled scripture directly, and separate from what is revealed to others. However, verse 17:93 implies that there should be a single book that is revealed to the Prophet, which all of them can read.[1]

Other suggested interpretations are:

(1) They demanded some scriptures to be sent to them from the heaven, which would name them in person and would tell them to believe in Muḥammad.

(2) They demanded some scriptures to be sent to them from the heaven, which would guarantee them abundant bounties and acquittal from punishment. That is the only way they would believe; otherwise, they would remain disbelievers.

Comment: There is more to the list, but all of them are incongruent with the context of the verses, and unsupported by the previous verses.

كَلَّا بَل لا يَخافُونَ الْآخِرَةَ ﴿٥٣﴾

1 In verse 17:93 they explicitly demand the Prophet to ascend to the heaven, and then require him to bring back a book as a written verification. (Trans.)

(74:53) ***Nay! Rather*** (bal) ***they fear not the hereafter.***

This verse rejects their expectation that every one of them must be given a separate divine book. The prophetic message is already established by clear signs and decisive proofs which leave no doubt for anyone. This makes God's argument equally complete against the messenger and the rest of the people. Therefore, there is no need for everyone who is called to the message to be given unrolled scriptures individually. Furthermore, being a medium for God's message requires an inherent purity and a spiritual preparation which the rest of the people lack. This can be inferred from a verse in Sūrah al-Anʿām: in response to their demand, *We will not believe unless we are given the like of what was given to Allah's messengers*, God says: *Allah knows best where to place His messengership* (6:124).

The word *bal* (rather, nay) indicates a substitution and correction to their demand in the last verse: *every one of them desires…* (74:52). It shows that their demand that each of them should receive an individual scripture is only an empty excuse to refrain from accepting the divine call. The real cause behind their disbelief and rejection of the message is indicated by: *they fear not the hereafter*. If they did, they would have believed, and would not have demanded any miracle once God's proof was made complete through clear signs and miracles.

كَلاَّ إِنَّهُ تَذْكِرَةٌ ﴿٥٤﴾

(74:54) ***Nay! It is indeed a reminder.***

This verse is a further rejection of their demand for each to be given a divine scripture. The meaning is: "No, We shall not send down such scriptures! The Qur'an is indeed such a sufficient reminder and admonition that meets the warning that We want to convey. And the consequence of this reminder is the compensation mentioned for those who obey and those who disobey, which is preserved with Us."

فَمَنْ شاءَ ذَكَرَهُ ﴿٥٥﴾

(74:55) ***So let anyone who wills remember it.***

Whoever wishes may take heed by its admonitions. That is because the call is made in the domain of free choice, without any coercion.

وَ ما يَذْكُرُونَ إِلاَّ أَنْ يَشاءَ اللَّهُ هُوَ أَهْلُ التَّقْوى وَ أَهْلُ الْمَغْفِرَةِ ﴿٥٦﴾

(74:56) ***And they do not remember unless Allah wills. He is worthy of Godwariness, and worthy of forgiveness.***

This verse clarifies and rejects a potential illusion that may occur in some people by hearing the last verse: *So let anyone who wills remember it* (74:55). They may imagine that the matter is left to them, and that they are independent in their choice and the consequences of their deeds. Hence, if they do not wish to take heed, they would not do so, and would thereby defeat God's will, for He has willed that they should take heed.

The gist of the answer to this illusion is that the divine rule of *qadar* (measurement, ordainment, predestination) runs through their actions just as it pervades any event in the universe. It is true that their remembrance—in case they remember—is a voluntary act that they would commit through their free will and without any coercion, but that itself is subject to God's will, who has ordained that they should act on their own volition. It is God's creational and causal will (*irādah takwīniyyah*) that one would perform a certain act through their choice and free will. Hence, while a voluntary act is contingent with respect to the person, it is also subject to the God's decree. If the divine will is removed, that act would not take place.[1]

… He is worthy of Godwariness…: God is worthy of being feared because He has absolute sovereignty over all things. One's happiness or wretchedness is exclusively in His hands.

… and worthy of forgiveness: It is befitting for God to forgive those who fear Him, because He is Ever-Forgiving and Ever-Merciful.

… He is worthy of Godwariness, and worthy of forgiveness: These two attributes of God can provide a justifying reason for the divine call, mentioned above: *It is indeed a reminder. So let anyone who wills remember it* (74:54-55). The connection should be clear. They can also provide a justifying reason for: *And they do not remember unless Allah wills* (74:56). Being worthy of Godwariness and worthy of forgiveness entails that He has a prevailing decree which encompasses the deeds of everyone. This means that people are not independent agents on their own, who can act

1 See verses 76:3 and 76:30 below. Also see volume 1, pp. 143 and 162ff of the English translation, under verses 2:21-25 and 2:26-27; volume 2, pp. 209ff and 271-272, under verses 2:153-157 and 2:164; volume 13, pp. 25ff and 81ff, under verses 6:9 and 6:35; volume 15, p. 65, under verses 7:10-25. (Trans.)

as they wish. No one can defeat or subdue God through their defiance and disobedience.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning *Rather, every one of them desires to be given unrolled scriptures [from Allah]!* (74:52) Imam al-Bāqir said: The verse was revealed when they [the polytheists] said, "O Muḥammad! We have been told that when someone from the Children of Israel sinned, they would find their sin and its atonement written next to their head [in a scroll] when they wake up the next morning." So Gabriel descended upon the Messenger of God and said, "Your people are demanding Our treatment of the Children of Israel with respect to sins. If that is what they want, We shall treat them as such by seizing them [with punishment] as We seized the Children of Israel." Then the people felt that the Messenger of God did not want this kind of treatment for his people.[1]

Author's comment: This narration is not compatible with the theme and tone of the verse. There are also signs of weakness in its content.[2]

(2) They [the polytheists] said, "If Muḥammad is truthful, then let each of us find a piece of writing under our head [that is, under our pillow] when we wake up the next morning, granting us acquittal and security from hell." Thus it was revealed: *Rather, every one of them desires to be given unrolled scriptures [from Allah]!* (74:52).[3]

Author's comment: This account is not in harmony with the context of the verses and the rejection of their claims [in verses 74:53-54].

(3) Concerning *Rather, every one of them desires to be given unrolled scriptures [from Allah]!* (74:52) Mujāhid said: So that every one of them would wake up with a scroll placed by them, which they could read, saying: "To so-and-so, from the Lord of the worlds."[4]

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1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

2 The word *zaʿm* (feeling, imagination, impression) at the end of the narration suggests that what is mentioned is uncertain. Further, the different parts of the story do not seem coherent. (Trans.)

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, Ibn Jarīr and Ibn al-Mundhir, on the authority of al-Suddī, on the authority of Abū Ṣāliḥ.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd and Ibn al-Mundhir.

Author's comment: This account can be matched with both the last one, and our interpretation of the verse.[1]

(4) Concerning *Rather, every one of them desires to be given unrolled scriptures [from Allah]!* (74:52) Qatādah said: Some people told Muḥammad, "If it pleases you that we follow you, then produce a book to us that orders us to follow you."[2]

Author's comment: This narration corresponds to a view that we discussed and refuted in our exposition, where verse 74:52 is matched with the verse: *And we will not believe your ascension…* (17:93).

(5) Concerning *He is worthy of Godwariness, and worthy of forgiveness* (74:56) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: He is worthy of being feared, and worthy of forgiving.

(6) Concerning *He is worthy of Godwariness, and worthy of forgiveness* (74:56) Imam al-Ṣādiq narrated [a sacred tradition (*ḥadīth qudsī*)] from God: "I am worthy of being feared. I am befitting of My servant not associating anything with Me. And if My servant does not associate anything with Me, I am worthy of admitting them to paradise." The Imam also said: "The Almighty God has taken a vow by His might and majesty not to punish with the fire those who adhere to His oneness (*tawḥīd*)."[3]

(7) Once the Messenger of God was asked about the verse: *He is worthy of Godwariness, and worthy of forgiveness* (74:56). He explained: God says, "I am worthy of being feared, so one should not associate a partner with Me. And if I am feared and no partner is associated with Me, then I am worthy of forgiving everything else."[4]

Author's comment: There are many Prophetic narrations that convey the same meaning.

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1 Since it does not specify the content of the scroll, it can be either a message of immunity from punishment, or a religious call. The former would match the previous narration; the latter would match the author's interpretation of the verse. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ᶜAbd b. Ḥumayd and Ibn al-Mundhir.

3 *Al-Tawḥīd*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of ᶜAbd-Allāh b. Dīnār, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah, Ibn ᶜUmar and Ibn ᶜAbbās.

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Chapter 75

al-Qiyamah
(The Greater Resurrection)

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Verses 1-15

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمنِ الرَّحِيمِ

لا أُقْسِمُ بِيَوْمِ الْقِيامَةِ ﴿١﴾ وَ لا أُقْسِمُ بِالنَّفْسِ اللَّوَّامَةِ ﴿٢﴾ أَ يَحْسَبُ الْإِنْسانُ أَلَّنْ
نَجْمَعَ عِظامَهُ ﴿٣﴾ بَلى قادِرِينَ عَلى أَنْ نُسَوِّيَ بَنانَهُ ﴿٤﴾ بَلْ يُرِيدُ الْإِنْسانُ لِيَفْجُرَ
أَمامَهُ ﴿٥﴾ يَسْئَلُ أَيَّانَ يَوْمُ الْقِيامَةِ ﴿٦﴾ فَإِذا بَرِقَ الْبَصَرُ ﴿٧﴾ وَ خَسَفَ الْقَمَرُ ﴿٨﴾ وَ
جُمِعَ الشَّمْسُ وَ الْقَمَرُ ﴿٩﴾ يَقُولُ الْإِنْسانُ يَوْمَئِذٍ أَيْنَ الْمَفَرُّ ﴿١٠﴾ كَلاَّ لا وَزَرَ ﴿١١﴾ إِلى
رَبِّكَ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْمُسْتَقَرُّ ﴿١٢﴾ يُنَبَّؤُا الْإِنْسانُ يَوْمَئِذٍ بِما قَدَّمَ وَ أَخَّرَ ﴿١٣﴾ بَلِ الْإِنْسانُ
عَلى نَفْسِهِ بَصِيرَةٌ ﴿١٤﴾ وَ لَوْ أَلْقى مَعاذِيرَهُ ﴿١٥﴾

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

(75:1) *Nay, I swear by the Day of Resurrection!*
(75:2) *Nay, I swear by the self-blaming soul!*
(75:3) *Does man suppose that We shall not assemble his bones?*
(75:4) *Yes indeed, being able to fashion [even] his fingers!*
(75:5) *Rather, man wishes to sin ahead of him.*
(75:6) *He asks, "When will be the Day of Resurrection?!"*
(75:7) *But when the eyes are dazzled,*
(75:8) *And the moon is eclipsed,*
(75:9) *and the sun and the moon are brought together,*
(75:10) *that day man will say, "Where is the escape?"*
(75:11) *Alas! There is no refuge!*
(75:12) *Unto your Lord is the recourse that day.*
(75:13) *That day man will be informed about what he has sent ahead and left behind.*

(75:14) *Rather, man is very insightful over himself,*
(75:15) *though he may tender his excuses.*

Introduction & Commentary

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 40 verses The sūrah revolves around the greater resurrection (*al-qiyāmat al-kubrá*).[1] It begins by affirming the occurrence of the resurrection. Then it proceeds to depict some of its signs, and a brief account of what humans will experience at that point. It identifies the occasion of one's death as a gateway that leads to the hereafter. Finally, the chapter closes with an argument for God's power over restoration of life by reference to His power of origination. The theme of the verses testify that the chapter was revealed in Mecca.

لا أُقْسِمُ بِيَوْمِ الْقِيامَةِ ﴿١﴾

(75:1) ***Nay, I swear* (lā uqsimu) *by the Day of Resurrection!***

There are three views on *lā uqsimu*: (1) It is an expression of an oath as a whole. (2) The negative particle *lā* (nay, no, not) is *zā'idah* (extra, redundant, semantically empty). (3) The negative particle *lā* implies a negation.[2] Either way, the verse indicates an oath by the Day of Resurrection.[3]

وَ لا أُقْسِمُ بِالنَّفْسِ اللَّوَّامَةِ ﴿٢﴾

(75:2) ***Nay, I swear by the self-blaming soul!***

This is a second oath, as the context of the verse and its textual similarity to the first verse suggest. Therefore, we must reject the view that the verse implies a negation of a vow, saying: "I swear by the Day of

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1 That is when everyone is raised back to life, as opposed to each person's death, which marks their individual afterlife, known as the minor or lesser resurrection (*al-qiyāmat al-ṣughrá*). (Trans.)

2 Another possible view is that the particle *lā* serves a twofold role of an exclamation that catches the attention of the audience, and a refutation of a common belief among them. It harbingers a statement that is contrary to the prevailing view. This twofold role can be traced in all Qur'anic instances of *lā uqsimu*. (Trans.)

3 Even if the *lā* indicates a negation, as per the third view, that would only emphasize the magnificence of the Day of Resurrection. That is exactly what a vow does. (Trans.)

Resurrection, but I do not swear by the self-blaming soul."

There are three possible meanings for *the self-blaming soul*, all of which are acceptable:

(1) It is the soul of a believer, which blames the person for committing sins, and for being lethargic in the way of obedience. This will prove beneficial to the person on the Day of Resurrection.

(2) Some have suggested that it is the soul of a disbeliever, which will blame the person on the Day of Resurrection for their disbelief and disobedience, as per the verse: *They will hide their remorse when they see the punishment* (10:54, 34:33).

(3) It is the human soul in general, including both righteous believers and sinful disbelievers. Everyone's soul will blame the person on the Day of Resurrection. If the person was a disbeliever, it will reproach them for their disbelief and their sinfulness. If the person was a believer, it will censure them for insufficient obedience and good deeds.

The complement of the vows in these verses is omitted, but it can be understood from the verses that follow. The implied complement is: "You will certainly be resurrected." This omission indicates the greatness and magnificence of that day. God says elsewhere: *It weighs heavy on the heavens and the earth. It will not overtake you but suddenly* (7:187); *Indeed the Hour is bound to come: I will have it hidden, so that every soul may be re-warded for what it strives for* (20:15); *What is it about which they question each other?! [Is it] about the mighty news* (78:1-2).

أَ يَحْسَبُ الْإِنْسانُ أَلَّنْ نَجْمَعَ عِظامَهُ ﴿٣﴾

(75:3) *Does man suppose* (yaḥsabu, from ḥusbān) *that We shall not assemble his bones?*

This is a rhetorical question that implies censure and rebuke. "Assembling the bones" is a way of referring to resurrection after death. *Ḥusbān* is synonymous with *ẓann* (thinking, supposing, speculating). The verse's meaning should be clear.

بَلى قادِرِينَ عَلى أَنْ نُسَوِّيَ بَنانَهُ ﴿٤﴾

(75:4) *Yes indeed, being able* (qādirīn) *to fashion* (nusawwiya from taswiyah) [even] *his fingers* (banānahu)*!*

There is an omission in the first part of the verse, where the implied meaning is: "Yes indeed, We will assemble their bones." *Banān* means

"fingertips." It has also been interpreted as "fingers." What is meant by *taswiyah* (fashioning, shaping, proportioning, arranging) is giving the fingers the exact same shape and form that they had before. The meaning is: "Yes, We shall indeed assemble the bones, while We are able to even re-fashion their fingers with the same shape and form that they had when We first created them."[1]

Perhaps the reason why the verse mentions the fingers in particular is their fascinating creation in terms of their design, their arrangement and their number. Fingers are a source of countless benefits which distinguish humans from other animals. They can be contracted and expanded in a number of ways to pick up things and move them around. One can perform many subtle movements by fingers to produce detailed works and fine arts. Moreover, there are the impressions on the fingertips, with new mysteries about them being constantly discovered.[2]

Another suggested meaning is: *Taswiyah* (lit. balancing, levelling, equalizing) means making the fingers and the toes all the same, much like the hooves of camels and donkeys. The meaning would be: "We are capable of making their fingers equal, in which case they would not be able to perform the various functions that they can with different fingers." The first interpretation is more plausible.

بَلْ يُرِيدُ الْإِنْسانُ لِيَفْجُرَ أَمامَهُ ۝٥

(75:5) *Rather* (bal), *man wishes to sin* (li-yafjura, from fajr and fujūr) *ahead of him* (amāmahu).

Al-Rāghib says:

> *Fajr* means "splitting and cleaving something wide open." *Fujūr* means "rending the curtain of piety and religiosity." It is used as *fajara fujūran*. The person who does so (its *ism al-fāʿil*) is called *fājir*, and its plural forms are *fujjār* and *fajarah*.

Amām (ahead, front, before) is a *ẓarf makān* (locative container, adverbial noun of place) which is used metaphorically for future. "Sinning

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1 *Qādirīn* (being able) is a *ḥāl* (circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase) for the implied pronoun "We." (Auth.)

2 Despite the cerebral proximity of dolphins to humans, they are incapable of modifying the world partly due to lacking the advanced motor skills embodied in human hands and fingers. (Trans.)

ahead" means continuing to sin as long as one lives. The antecedent of the pronoun "him" is *man*. While the verse could have used a pronoun, it explicitly repeats the noun *man* [following verse 75:3 above]. There are three further repetitions of this noun in the verses below [75:10, 75:13-14].

… to sin ahead of him: What is meant here is to explain why the people deny the resurrection after this life. The word *bal* (rather, nay) at the beginning of the verse indicates a substitution and correction to their impression that there will be no resurrection after death. The meaning is: "It is not because they have any genuine doubts about Our ability to assemble their bones. Rather, they deny the resurrection because they wish to be libertines as long as they live. There would be no reason to commit oneself to faith and *taqwá* (Godwariness, self-restraint, piety) if there is no reckoning and retribution ahead." This is what we can deduce from the theme and context of the verse. Exegetes have offered other interpretations for the verse that are unlikely and incongruous with the verse's theme and context. We will forgo discussing their views.

يَسْئَلُ أَيَّانَ يَوْمُ الْقِيامَةِ ﴿٦﴾

(76:6) ***He asks, "When will be the Day of Resurrection?!"***

Apparently this verse is an interpretation of the last verse: *Rather, man wishes to sin ahead of him* (75:5). Thus it implies a justification: "That is why he asks…" This question implies a denial and is made from such an angle. When one is called to faith and Godwariness, is warned about a tremendous event, is shown clear signs, and is provided with decisive arguments, then it is befitting for them to take heed, to equip themselves with faith and Godwariness, and to prepare for their big day. It should not make a difference whether that day is near or far, because "anything that is bound to come is [practically] near."[1] It is not a responsible attitude for such a person to start asking, "When will the Hour come to pass? When will be the Day of Resurrection?" Only one who wishes to deny and deride the matter would ask such questions.

فَإِذا بَرِقَ الْبَصَرُ ﴿٧﴾ وَ خَسَفَ الْقَمَرُ ﴿٨﴾ وَ جُمِعَ الشَّمْسُ وَ الْقَمَرُ ﴿٩﴾

(75:7-9) ***But when the eyes are dazzled*** **(bariqa, from barīq),** ***And the***

1 This is a famous Prophetic narration and proverb that is reported in several Sunni and Shia sources. See hadith number 4 under verses 76:23-31. (Trans.)

moon is eclipsed **(khasafa, from khusūf),** ***And the sun and the moon are brought together,***

These verses include some of the signs of the Hour. The word *barīq* is used for the eye when it is perplexed and stunned in seeing. *Khusūf* of the moon means the loss of its light.

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يَقُولُ الْإِنْسانُ يَوْمَئِذٍ أَيْنَ الْمَفَرُّ ﴿١٠﴾

(75:10) ***that day man will say, "Where is the escape*** **(al-mafarr)*?"***

Mafarr means "a refuge or shelter," where one would escape to. God's absolute dominion over all things will manifest on that day, and the guilty individuals would certainly realize that there is no escape at that point. Therefore, asking *"Where is the escape?"* is their spontaneous reaction as an expression of the traits that are deeply rooted in their souls. It was their wont in their life to inquire about a refuge whenever they faced a difficulty or threat. The same tendency will manifest on that day. This is comparable to lying about not having associated partners with God, as reflected in these verses: *Then their only excuse will be to say, "By Allah, our Lord, we were not polytheists"* (6:23); *The day when Allah will raise them all together, they will swear to Him, just like they swear to you [now]* (58:18).

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كَلاَّ لا وَزَرَ ﴿١١﴾

(75:11) ***Alas! There is no refuge*** **(wazar)*!***

This verse is God's response, not a continuation of man's speech, where He lets them down in their search for a refuge. *Wazar* means "any sanctuary or shelter," such as a mountain or a fort.

إِلى رَبِّكَ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْمُسْتَقَرُّ ﴿١٢﴾

(75:12) ***Unto your Lord is the recourse that day.***

This verse is addressed to the Prophet. Stating the complement (*Unto your Lord*) before the subject (*the recourse*) indicates exclusivity. This means that one cannot resort to any refuge or asylum to protect themselves. This is because the human being is on an inextricable journey toward God, as He says: *O man! You are labouring toward your Lord laboriously, and you will encounter Him* (84:6); *Indeed to your Lord is the return* (96:8); *and that to your Lord is the final end* (53:42). Therefore, one will inevitably meet their Lord, will return to Him, and will end at His

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presence, where they will not be veiled or obstructed by anything from Him. This does not contradict what we read elsewhere: *Nay! Rather, their hearts have been sullied by what they have been earning. Nay! They will be veiled from their Lord on that day* (83:14-15) because of the theme and context of the verses. The veil intended there is being barred from God's grace and mercy, not remaining in ignorance about one's Lord or being absent from Him.

Here are two other possible interpretations for the verse:

(1) Man's *recourse* means where one will settle down in terms of felicity, wretchedness, paradise and hell. That will be up to God's decree. He will place in paradise whomever He has willed, which are the Godwary. And He will place in hell whomever He has willed, which are the wrongdoers. The Qur'an says: *He punishes whomever He wills, and forgives whomever He wills* (5:40).

(2) Their recourse will be God's judgment, which will be the only thing that rules over the people on that day. The Qur'an says: *Everything is to perish except His Face. All Judgment belongs to Him, and to Him you will be brought back* (28:88).

يُنَبَّؤُا الْإِنْسانُ يَوْمَئِذٍ بِما قَدَّمَ وَ أَخَّرَ ﴿١٣﴾

(75:13) *That day man will be informed about what he has sent ahead and left behind.*

There are two possible interpretations for *what he has sent ahead and left behind*: (1) One's actions—whether good or evil—in the earlier years of one's life, and one's actions in their later years. (2) The deeds—both good and evil—that one sends ahead before one's death, and the deeds that accrue to the person after their death as a result of a good or evil custom that they established and was followed. They will be rewarded if it was a good custom, and punished if it was an evil one.[1]

Other suggested interpretations are:

(1) *What he has sent ahead* indicates any good act or evil deed that one performs. One will be rewarded for the former, and punished for the latter. *And left behind* indicates any good act or evil deed that one leaves behind. One will be punished for the former, and

1 An alternative translation that fits both meanings is: *what he has sent before and sent after*. (Trans.)

rewarded for the latter.

(2) *What he has sent ahead* refers to the acts of disobedience that one commits, while *and left behind* refers to the acts of obedience that one fails to fulfill.

(3) *What he has sent ahead* means the acts of obedience that one sends ahead, while *and left behind* means the rights of God which one neglects and does not observe.

(4) *What he has sent ahead* are the possessions that one sends ahead for oneself, while *and left behind* are things that one leaves for one's inheritors.

Comment: All of these are implausible views that are far from what springs first to the mind.

بَلِ الْإِنْسانُ عَلى نَفْسِهِ بَصِيرَةٌ ﴿١٤﴾

(75:14) *Rather* (bal), *man is very insightful* (baṣīrah) *over himself,*

The word *bal* (rather, nay) shows that this verse is stated as a substitution for the last verse: *That day man will be informed…* (75:13). *Baṣīrah* (insight) means "the vision of the heart, intuitive realization." The verse literally says, "man is *insight* [not insightful]," which is a form of emphasis and exaggeration. This is like saying, "Zayd is *justice*" [to emphasize that he is very just].[1] Alternatively, the verse involves an omitted *dhū* (possessor of). The implied meaning is "Man is possessor of insight with respect to himself."

Baṣīrah has also been interpreted as *ḥujjah* (proof, evidence, argument), as per the verse: *no one has sent these [signs] except the Lord of the heavens and the earth as proofs* (baṣāʾir) (17:102). Indeed, one will be a clear proof against oneself on that day, since one will be questioned concerning their hearing, sight and heart; since their ears, eyes and skin will testify against them; and since their hands and feet will speak. The Qur'an says: *Indeed the hearing, the eyesight, and the heart, all of these shall be questioned about* (17:36); *their ears and their eyes and their skins will testify against them* (41:20); *and their hands shall speak to Us, and their feet shall bear witness* (36:65).[2]

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1 In other words, using a noun instead of an adjective indicates emphasis. (Trans.)

2 Another possible meaning is that *baṣīrah* is the same as the adjective *baṣīr*

وَ لَوْ أَلْقى مَعاذِيرَهُ ﴿١٥﴾

(75:15) *though he may tender his excuses* (maʿādhīrah).

Maʿādhīr is the plural of *maʿdhirah*, which means "stating impediments that prevent one from a desirable course of action." The meaning is: "One has insight over oneself even though they may try to exonerate themselves from punishment by bringing excuses."

Another suggested interpretation is that *maʿādhīr* is the plural of *miʿdhār*, which means "veil, cover." The meaning is: "Even though one may produce a cover to hide one's deeds, one's own soul is a striking witness against oneself."

Both interpretations boil down to the same idea.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning *Nay, I swear by the self-blaming soul!* (75:2) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: That is the soul of Adam, who sinned and was thus reproached by God.

Author's comment: The connection between this interpretation and the verse is not clear.

(2) Concerning *Rather, man wishes to sin ahead of him* (75:5) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It means committing a sin today and postponing repentance, thinking that "I will repent later."

(3) Concerning *But when the eyes are dazzled* (75:7) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: The eyes will be dazzled such that they cannot blink.

(4) Concerning *Rather, man is very insightful over himself, though he may tender his excuses* (75:14-15) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: One knows what they have done, even though they may make excuses.

(5) ʿUmar b. Yazīd says: Once I was having supper with Imam al-Ṣādiq, when he recited: *Rather, man is very insightful over himself, though he may tender his excuses* (75:14-15). Then, he said, "Abū Ḥafṣ! Why should one resort to excuses before others contrary to when God knows about him? The Messenger of God

(insightful, cognizant). Then the ending *ah* could either indicate the feminine, because what is meant by *man* is one's *nafs* (soul, self); or could indicate extent and intensity. The meaning would be: "Rather, one is indeed well-aware of oneself." (Trans.)

used to say: 'Anyone who holds a secret intention, God will clothe them in a cloak alike. If it is a good intention, then it will be a good cloak; and if it is an evil one, then it will be evil.'"[1]

(6) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Why should one of you reveal their good and conceal their evil? Wouldn't they know, upon introspection, that they are not as such [that is, as they pretend to be]? The Almighty God says: *Rather, man is very insightful over himself* (75:14). If one's inside is upright, their outside will [also] grow strong.[2]

(7) Zurārah says: I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq, "Where is the borderline in illness where one should stop fasting?" The Imam recited the verse: *Rather, man is very insightful over himself* (75:14), and said, "One knows best what they can endure."[3]

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of transmission.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-ʿAyyāshī, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Muslim. This hadith is also reported in *al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Faḍl Abī al-ʿAbbās, from the Imam.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-ʿAyyāshī. This hadith is also reported in *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*.

Verses 16-40

لا تُحَرِّكْ بِهِ لِسانَكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِهِ ﴿١٦﴾ إِنَّ عَلَيْنا جَمْعَهُ وَ قُرْآنَهُ ﴿١٧﴾ فَإِذا قَرَأْناهُ فَاتَّبِعْ
قُرْآنَهُ ﴿١٨﴾ ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنا بَيانَهُ ﴿١٩﴾ كَلاَّ بَلْ تُحِبُّونَ الْعاجِلَةَ ﴿٢٠﴾ وَ تَذَرُونَ الْآخِرَةَ ﴿٢١﴾
وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ ناضِرَةٌ ﴿٢٢﴾ إِلى رَبِّها ناظِرَةٌ ﴿٢٣﴾ وَ وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ باسِرَةٌ ﴿٢٤﴾ تَظُنُّ أَنْ
يُفْعَلَ بِها فاقِرَةٌ ﴿٢٥﴾ كَلاَّ إِذا بَلَغَتِ التَّراقِيَ ﴿٢٦﴾ وَ قِيلَ مَنْ راقٍ ﴿٢٧﴾ وَ ظَنَّ أَنَّهُ الْفِراقُ
﴿٢٨﴾ وَ الْتَفَّتِ السَّاقُ بِالسَّاقِ ﴿٢٩﴾ إِلى رَبِّكَ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْمَساقُ ﴿٣٠﴾ فَلا صَدَّقَ وَ لا صَلَّى
﴿٣١﴾ وَ لكِنْ كَذَّبَ وَ تَوَلَّى ﴿٣٢﴾ ثُمَّ ذَهَبَ إِلى أَهْلِهِ يَتَمَطَّى ﴿٣٣﴾ أَوْلى لَكَ فَأَوْلى ﴿٣٤﴾
ثُمَّ أَوْلى لَكَ فَأَوْلى ﴿٣٥﴾ أَ يَحْسَبُ الْإِنْسانُ أَنْ يُتْرَكَ سُدىً ﴿٣٦﴾ أَ لَمْ يَكُ نُطْفَةً مِنْ
مَنِيٍّ يُمْنى ﴿٣٧﴾ ثُمَّ كانَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقَ فَسَوَّى ﴿٣٨﴾ فَجَعَلَ مِنْهُ الزَّوْجَيْنِ الذَّكَرَ وَ
الْأُنْثى ﴿٣٩﴾ أَ لَيْسَ ذلِكَ بِقادِرٍ عَلى أَنْ يُحْيِيَ الْمَوْتى ﴿٤٠﴾

(75:16) *Do not move your tongue with it to hasten it.*
(75:17) *Indeed its collection and its recitation are upon Us.*
(75:18) *And when We have recited it, follow its recitation.*
(75:19) *Then, its exposition is [also] upon Us.*
(75:20) *Nay! Rather, you love the immediate,*
(75:21) *and you neglect the hereafter.*
(75:22) *Some faces will be radiant on that day,*
(75:23) *looking toward their Lord;*
(75:24) *and some faces will be scowling on that day,*
(75:25) *knowing that they will be dealt out a punishment breaking the spine.*
(75:26) *Nay! When it reaches the collar bones,*
(75:27) *and it is said, "Where is the wizard?"*
(75:28) *and he realizes that it is the [time of] parting,*
(75:29) *and one shank is intertwined with another shank,*
(75:30) *unto your Lord will be the driving that day.*
(75:31) *But he neither confirmed [the truth], nor prayed,*

(75:32) *but denied [it] and turned away,*
(75:33) *and went swaggering to his family.*
(75:34) *You well deserve! Yes, you well deserve!*
(75:35) *Again, you well deserve! Yes, you well deserve!*
(75:36) *Does man suppose that he will be left forlorn?*
(75:37) *Was he not a drop of emitted semen?*
(75:38) *Then he became a clinging mass; then He created [him] and fashioned [him],*
(75:39) *and made of him the two sexes, the male and the female.*
(75:40) *Is He not able to revive the dead?*

Introduction & Commentary

These verses continue to paint the picture of the resurrection by describing the condition of the people on that day. They will be classified into two groups: the face of some will be radiating with joy, while others will bear expressions of despondency and despair. The onset of this process will be at the time of death. The verses clarify that the human being is not left futile and aimless. The One Who created them the first time is capable of giving them life once again. And with that the chapter closes.

لا تُحَرِّكْ بِهِ لِسانَكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِهِ ﴿١٦﴾

(75:16) ***Do not move your tongue with it to hasten it.***

This verse and the next three [up to verse 75:19] are parenthetical remarks that are unrelated to the previous and subsequent discussion about the Day of Resurrection. They digress from the theme and context of the verses before and after. In these verses, God teaches the Prophet the proper manners that he must follow when the Noble Qur'an is being revealed to him. He should not hasten to recite what has not been revealed yet. Nor should he utter anything, but he must remain quiet until the revelation is over. These four verses [75:16-19] are similar in meaning to the verse: *Do not hasten with the Qur'an before its revelation is completed for you* (20:114).

This can be compared to our ordinary conversations, where sometimes the listener suggests a word or two to complement the speaker's sentence before the speaker is done. This act of cutting off the speaker prevents the listener from fully giving ear to what is being said. The current verses are like the speaker stopping their discussion, and advising the listener:

"Don't jump ahead of my speech! Just remain silent and listen to what I'm telling you." Then the speaker continues with the rest of their message.

Do not move your tongue with it to hasten it: This verse is addressed to the Prophet. The two pronouns "it" refer to revelation, or to the Qur'an that is being revealed to him. The meaning is: "Do not move your tongue to receive the revelation faster, such that you would hasten to recite what We have not recited to you yet." As we said above, the verse's message is the same as: *Do not hasten with the Qur'an before its revelation is completed for you* (20:114). The prohibition against hastening with the Qur'an confirms an idea that is found in some narrations, stating that the Qur'an was first revealed to the Prophet all at once, and was then revealed again gradually over the years. We discussed this under verse 20:114.[1]

إِنَّ عَلَيْنا جَمْعَهُ وَ قُرْآنَهُ ﴿١٧﴾

(75:17) ***Indeed its collection and its recitation* (qurʾānahu)** ***are upon Us.***

The word *qurʾān* (recitation, reading) is a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund) here, similar to *furqān* (distinction, discrimination) and *rujḥān* (preference, outweighing). The two pronouns "its" refer to revelation. The meaning is: "Do not hasten the revelation, because it is up to Us to compile what We are revealing to you by putting its parts together. It is also up to Us to recite it to you. There is no need for you to go ahead of Us in reciting what has not been revealed yet, because We will not neglect any part of it."

Another suggested meaning is: "It is upon Us to collect and contain the message in your heart, such that you do not miss any part of its meanings. And it is upon Us to affirm its recitation on your tongue, such that you may recite it whenever you wish." This interpretation, however, is not quite apparent.

فَإِذا قَرَأْناهُ فَاتَّبِعْ قُرْآنَهُ ﴿١٨﴾

(75:18) ***And when We have recited it, follow its recitation.***

The meaning is: "Once We have finished reciting the Qur'an to you through revelation, follow Our recitation." In other words: "Start reciting it after the revelation is complete."

According to some exegetes, *follow its recitation* means following the message by remaining silent and paying close attention to what is being

1 See volume 27, p. 302 of the English translation. (Trans.)

said. This is a plausible interpretation. Two other suggested meanings are:

(1) "Follow the commands and prohibitions that are recited."

(2) "Following the recitation" means repeating it for oneself until it registers in the mind.

Comment: These two interpretations are not apparent.

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ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنا بَيانَهُ ﴿١٩﴾

(75:19) *Then* (thumma), *its exposition* (bayānahu) *is* [also] *upon Us.*

The meaning is: "After completing and reciting the recitation to you, it is also up to Us to elucidate it for you." The word *thumma* indicates sequence, because the exposition of a message is a subsequent stage to its collection and recitation.

Another suggested meaning is: "Then it is upon Us to convey it to the people through your tongue. Hence, We will preserve the message in your mind against any alteration or loss, until you recite it to the people."[1]

The Views of Exegetes

Here are some other interpretations suggested by the exegetes concerning the last four verses [75:16-19]:

(1) While revelation was still in progress, the Prophet would move his tongue and start reciting the message because he feared that he may forget. Thus these verses forbid him from doing so, and order him to remain silent until the revelation is completed. Therefore, the pronoun "it" in *Do not move your tongue with it* (75:16) refers to the part of the Qur'an or revelation that was already recited, not the part that was not recited yet.

Comment: This view is not quite compatible with the context of the verses, because the verses command the Prophet not to hasten [75:16], but to follow the recitation after it is completed [75:18]. The above view is also incompatible with the verse: *Indeed its collection and its recitation are upon Us* (75:15). Our interpretation of the verse matches the context in a more apparent way.

(2) The subject of discussion here is not the Qur'an. Rather, the verses are about the people reading their record of deeds on the Day

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1 This meaning is based on interpreting *bayān* as "expression and communication," not as "interpretation and elucidation." (Trans.)

of Resurrection, as reflected in the preceding and the following verses. There is no indication in these verses to substantiate that they pertain to the Qur'an, or to any worldly event.

The verses rebuke and censure the person for hastening because there is no point in doing so. The meaning is: "Do not move your tongue rapidly when you read your book of deeds." In other words: "Read your record, but do not rush." This is said because when the abovementioned individual—who is *very insightful over himself* (75:14)—sees his sins, he would tend to hasten due to frustration. Thus he is censured: "Don't rush! Stay calm so that you may learn about your account. We shall indeed put together all the evidence against you. Once We do so, follow what is collected against you through submitting to its implications and accepting its consequences, because you are in no position to deny it. And in case you deny the account, it will be upon Us to elucidate it."

Comment: A parenthetical statement does not require to be linked to the verses before and after it in order for it to be complete. Moreover, much like the current set of verses, the verse, *Do not hasten with the Qur'an before its revelation is completed for you* (20:114) also appears in the middle of a discussion about the Day of Resurrection.[1]

(3) These four verses [75:16-19] pertain to the previous discussion concerning the Day of Resurrection.

Do not move (75:16) is addressed to the Prophet, and the pronoun "it"—in *with it*—refers to the Day of Resurrection. The meaning is: "Do not inquire about the time of the resurrection whatsoever, even if your question is not out of denial or derision."

To hasten it (75:16) means "wishing to know it beforehand."

Indeed its collection and its recitation are upon Us (75:17) means: "Our wisdom necessitates that We shall gather everyone on that day, and shall inform you about the properties of that day through Our revelation of the Qur'an."

And when We have recited it, follow its recitation (75:18). That is, "Once We have recited what pertains to that day, follow it in practice by preparing for it."

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1 This supports the author's interpretation because verse 20:114 explicitly mentions *the Qur'an* and *its revelation*. (Trans.)

Then, its exposition is [also] upon Us (75:19) means: "We will bring that day to light through the blowing of the Trumpet."

Comment: The implausibility of this interpretation should be evident.[1]

كَلَّا بَلْ تُحِبُّونَ الْعاجِلَةَ ﴿٢٠﴾

(75:20) ***Nay! Rather, you love the immediate,***

This verse is addressed to all people. It is unrelated to the last four verses—*Do not move…* (75:16-19)—which were a parenthetical address [to the Prophet] and independent of the verses before and after them.

Nay* (kallā)*…: The exclamation *kallā* (nay, never, no way) rejects the misconception mentioned in the verse: *Does man suppose that We shall not assemble his bones?* (75:3).

… Rather* (bal)*, you love the immediate: The word "life" is implied here. It means: "You love the immediate life," which is worldly life. The word *bal* (rather, nay) here shows the real reason behind their assumption that there is no afterlife. Hence, the use of *bal* here is comparable to its use in the verse: *Rather* (bal)*, man wishes to sin ahead of him* (75:5).

وَ تَذَرُونَ الْآخِرَةَ ﴿٢١﴾

(75:21) ***and you neglect* (tadharūna, from wadhr) *the hereafter.***

The word *wadhr* is synonymous with *tark* (forsaking, disregarding, leaving).

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ ناضِرَةٌ ﴿٢٢﴾

(75:22) ***Some faces will be radiant* (nāḍirah, from naḍrah) *on that day,***

This verse and the next three [up to verse 75:25] continue describing the Day of Resurrection by classifying the faces on that day into two groups: the resplendent and the scowling. *Naḍrah* and *naḍārah*, when used for faces, colors and plants, mean "freshness, beauty, verdure." The verse should be interpreted in contrast to the other group: *and some faces will be scowling on that day…* (75:24-25). The meaning is: "On the Day of Resurrection, some faces will be bright, happy and beaming. They will bear an evident expression of satisfaction." The Qur'an says: *You will perceive in their faces the resplendence of bliss* (83:24); a*nd He has met them with*

1 The interpretation is a contrived attempt at external consistency with the verses before and after, and also suffers from internal coherence. (Trans.)

resplendence and joy (76:11).

إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

(75:23) *looking toward their Lord;*

This verse is a second predicate for *Some faces* (75:22).[1] What is meant here is not seeing God through physical vision, as one would observe material objects. There are solid proofs against the possibility of such vision of the divine. Rather, what is meant is seeing God with the eye of the heart through the reality of faith. This kind of vision is supported by both rational arguments and transmitted narrations from the Infallibles. We presented some of these narrations under the following verses: *he [Moses] said, "My Lord, show [Yourself] to me, that I may look at You!"* (7:143); *The heart did not deny what it saw* (53:11).

These are individuals whose hearts are oriented toward their Lord. They are not diverted or distracted from Him due to engagement with any of the apparent means and causes, because that day will terminate and sever all the apparent instruments and links. As they stand in any station on that day, or pass any stage on their way, they are embraced by God's mercy: *and they shall be secure from terror on that day* (27:89). Even as they sail in the gardens of paradise and indulge in its pleasures, they will be constantly witnessing their Lord, because whatever they see or observe, they see it as a sign of God. And looking at a sign with the awareness that it is a sign, is the same as observing the reality that it signifies and reflects.

Question: Since the verse mentions *toward their Lord* before *looking* [in the original Arabic], it means that they will only be seeing God. But we know that they will certainly observe other things as well, such as heavenly pleasures. How is that possible?

Response: Our explanation above should clarify the answer. Since they are not veiled from their Lord, whatever they see, they will see it *as a sign*. A sign, inasmuch as it is a sign, does not veil what it signifies, and

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1 In the Arabic text of the verse, *toward their Lord*—which is the complement of the sentence—appears before *looking*. Such usage (where the *khabar* precedes the *mubtada'*) indicates either exclusivity or emphasis. (Auth.)

In the case of exclusivity the meaning would be: "They will be looking only toward their Lord." In the case of emphasis the meaning would be: "Their most salient quality is that they will be looking toward their Lord." (Trans.)

does not obstruct the observer from it. This means that looking at a sign is tantamount to looking at what it signifies. Hence, the look of these individuals will be really directed at their Lord.

Some have answered the above question as follows: *toward their Lord* is mentioned before *looking* not as an indication of exclusivity, but to respect the rhyme of the verses. Even if it indicates exclusivity, if one looks at something *next to* God and *along with* Him [not separately], that does not count as a second object of observation [to contradict exclusivity of vision]. Granted that it does, the verse implies exclusivity only at *certain* times, not *all* times.

Comment: This answer imposes an extra qualification on the verse without any basis for it. Moreover, the verse ascribes looking to *faces*, not to *eyes*. This means that the people of paradise will be constantly *facing* their Lord and *oriented toward* Him. This is not compatible with facing anything else and having any other object of orientation.[1]

وَ وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ باسِرَةٌ ﴿٢٤﴾ تَظُنُّ أَنْ يُفْعَلَ بِها فاقِرَةٌ ﴿٢٥﴾

(75:24-25) ***and some faces will be scowling*** **(bāsirah, from busūr)** ***on that day, knowing*** **(taẓunnu, from ẓann)** ***that they will be dealt out a punishment breaking the spine*** **(fāqirah).**

Busūr has been interpreted as an intense form of frowning, and *ẓann*

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1 The author's interpretation of the verse is subtle, insightful and mystical. Some faces will be directed toward the Absolute. Those are the ones who were not caught up with the particulars, but remained mindful of the colorless emptiness that takes on all forms. For them this prayer is realized: "Lord, give us weak eyes for things of little worth, and eyes clear-sighted in all of your truth." Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, ed. and trans. H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong (1980), p. 3 (epigraph).

Meanwhile, on a more apparent level, *naẓar* (looking) in this verse means *intiẓār* (expectation, anticipation). This is confirmed by hadith number 4 below, and subsequently accepted by the author. The meaning is: "Some individuals will be expecting good from their Lord; they will have an eye on Him." The verse is not about *vision* whatsoever, whether the vision of the heart or the vision of the eye. The same sense of "looking" is used in verses 27:35, 33:53, 39:68. For more on this, see the footnotes on volume 16, pp. 75-76 and 82 of the English translation. (Trans.)

as knowledge. *Fāqirah* (breaking) is an adjective for an omitted noun. What is implied is "a breaking act or event." The verb *faqara* is used when the backbone is struck. Some have said that it is used when one brands a camel's muzzle.

The meaning is: "Some faces on that day will be severely grieved because they know that they will be met with a treatment that will break their backbone—or will brand their nose." It is also possible that the verb *taẓunnu* is in the second person, addressed to the Prophet as the receiver of these verses. Then *ẓann* (thinking, speculation, expectation) would convey its usual sense.[1]

كَلَّآ إِذا بَلَغَتِ التَّراقِيَ ﴿٢٦﴾

(75:26) ***Nay* (kallā)*! When it reaches the collar bones* (al-tarāqī),**

The exclamation *kallā* (nay, never, no way) is a deterrence and prohibition against their quality of loving this world and giving it priority over the hereafter. It is as though the verse is saying: "Refrain from this attitude, because these things are not permanent. Soon death will befall you, whereby you will be driven toward your Lord." *Tarāqī* denotes "the bones that surround the neck on the two sides." It is the plural of *tarquwah*. The implied meaning is: "When the soul reaches the collar bones."[2] This is comparable to the verse: *So when it reaches the throat* (56:83). The meaning should be clear.

وَ قِيلَ مَنْ راقٍ ﴿٢٧﴾

(75:27) ***and it is said, "Where is the wizard* (rāq)*?"***

The meaning is: "His family and friends around him will ask [one another]: Who can cure him? Can anyone make a charm for him?"[3] This

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1 The meaning would be: "Seeing their condition, you, O Muḥammad, would imagine and guess that something excruciating is about to befall them." (Trans.)

2 The subject in this expression—*it reaches* [that is, the antecedent of the pronoun "it"]—is omitted, as it is understood from the context. (Auth.)

3 *Rāq* (enchanter, healer) is an *ism al-fāʿil* (nominative substantive, active participial noun) derived from *raqy*. (Auth.)

is an expression of despair.[1]

Another suggested interpretation is that this is what some angels will tell others: "Who is going to raise (*yarqá*) his soul? Will it be the angels of punishment or the angels of mercy?"[2]

وَ ظَنَّ أَنَّهُ الْفِراقُ ﴿٢٨﴾

(75:28) ***and he realizes that it is the [time of] parting,***

Seeing these events, the person on their deathbed will know that they are about to leave behind the present world which they loved so much, and which they had chosen over the hereafter.

وَ الْتَفَّتِ السَّاقُ بِالسَّاقِ ﴿٢٩﴾

(75:29) ***and one shank is intertwined with another shank,***

The apparent meaning of this verse is that one shank of the dying person is wrapped with the other as their soul reaches their collar bones and life departs from their body.

Other suggested meanings are:

(1) The intensity of afterlife will be intertwined with the affairs of this world.
(2) The state of death will be intertwined with the state of life.
(3) The shank of this life—that is, severe death throes—will be intertwined with the shank of afterlife—that is, the intense terror of encountering what awaits one in that realm (*hawl al-muṭṭalaᶜ*).

Comment: There is no evidence in the text of the verse to substantiate any of these meanings. However, there is another plausible interpretation: The "intertwining of the shanks" is an expression for being overwhelmed by a series of calamities one after another, starting from the time of death until the Day of Resurrection. This interpretation incorporates all the above suggestions.

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1 The verse depicts man's helplessness in the face of death. For more Qur'anic insight on this theme, see verses 28:81, 38:3, 41:48, 42:35, 42:47, 50:36, 51:45, 56:83-87, 96:17. (Trans.)

2 In this interpretation, *rāqī* means "elevator, lifter." *Ruqyah* (healing spell) is from the same root since it lifts the disease and elevates one's condition. Note that *rāq* in the verse is an apocopated form (*majzūm*) of *rāqī*. See Muṣṭafawī, *al-Taḥqīq*, under *r-q-y*. (Trans.)

إِلى رَبِّكَ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْمَساقُ ﴿٣٠﴾

(75:30) ***unto your Lord will be the driving*** **(al-masāq)** ***that day.***

The meaning is: "The return on that day will be toward God."[1] The use of *driving* here indicates that one has no choice or alternative but to make this journey. One has to proceed on a certain path from the day of their death—as reflected in this verse: *unto your Lord will be the driving that day*—until they reach the presence of their Lord on the Day of resurrection—as reflected in the verse: *Unto your Lord is the recourse that day* (75:12). Since the complement (*unto your Lord*) is mentioned before the subject (*the driving*), one could infer a sense of exclusivity from the verse. In that case, it means that the final end will be *only* toward God.

Other suggested interpretations are:

(1) What is meant by "God" is "God's *judgment*," which means that there is an implied omitted *muḍāf* (annexed noun, construct noun) in the verse. Further, beginning the verse with *unto your Lord* indicates exclusivity. The implied meaning is: "The driving on that day will be only toward the judgment of your Lord." In other words: "People will be summoned and presented so that God may apply and execute His judgment among them."

(2) What is meant by "God" is "God's *promised abode*." The implied meaning is: "The driving will be only toward the promise of your Lord," which would be either paradise or hell.

(3) What is meant by God being the end point of the driving is that He alone is the One Who will drive the individuals [in their journey from death to their eternal abode].

Comment: The interpretation we offered above is more plausible.[2]

فَلا صَدَّقَ وَ لا صَلَّى ﴿٣١﴾ وَ لكِنْ كَذَّبَ وَ تَوَلَّى ﴿٣٢﴾ ثُمَّ ذَهَبَ إِلى أَهْلِهِ يَتَمَطَّى ﴿٣٣﴾

(75:31-33) ***But he neither confirmed [the truth], nor prayed, but denied [it] and turned away*** **(yatamaṭṭá, from tamaṭṭī)**, ***and went swaggering to***

1 *Masāq* is a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund), synonymous with *sawq* (driving, procession). (Auth.)

2 The first two interpretations are less preferred because they imply an omission in the verse. The last interpretation is less preferred because it diverts the preposition *ilá* (unto, toward) from its apparent meaning. (Trans.)

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his family.

The antecedent of the pronouns in these verses is *man*, which was mentioned in the verse: *Does man suppose…* (75:3). What is meant by "confirmation" in verse 75:31 is accepting the call of the truth, which is conveyed in the Qur'an. What is meant by "prayer" is turning one's attention to God in worship through the ritual of prayer, which is the "pillar of religion" [as per hadith]. According to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, *tamaṭṭī* (75:32) means stretching the body due to exhaustion. It is originally used for twisting one's back. The word is used metaphorically here to imply "swaggering and strutting."

The meaning is: "The person did not confirm the root beliefs that are found in the religious call. Nor did they pray to their Lord, where prayer represents the practical branches of religion which are entailed by the root beliefs. Instead, they denied the message, turned away from it in despise, and swaggered toward their family, filled with haughtiness."

أَوْلَىٰ لَكَ فَأَوْلَىٰ ﴿٣٤﴾ ثُمَّ أَوْلَىٰ لَكَ فَأَوْلَىٰ ﴿٣٥﴾

(75:34-35) ***You well deserve* (awlá laka)*! Yes, you well deserve! Again, you well deserve! Yes, you well deserve!***

The expression found in these verses implies threat and warning, which is repeated for emphasis. Here is a possible interpretation, while God knows best: Apparently these verses are a predicate for an omitted subject, which is a pronoun referring to the abovementioned qualities of the person in question. It was said that *he neither confirmed [the truth], nor prayed, but denied [it] and turned away, and went swaggering to his family* (75:31-33). Then these verses affirm these qualities for the person, which implies that the person will be facing their consequences and punishments.

Accordingly, these verses are a curse from God, addressed to the abovementioned individual. This curse indicates God's sealing of the person's heart, which prevents the entrance of faith and Godwariness. It is a divine decree that the person is doomed to hell. The two verses are, in a way, comparable to the verse: *But when a definitive sūrah is sent down and war is mentioned in it, you see those in whose hearts is a disease looking upon you with the look of someone fainting at death. And they well deserve it!* (47:20).

The meaning is: "You have first-class priority (*awlá laka*) to your current condition. It fits you very well! And you shall have first-class priority

to the consequences of your deeds. It is befitting of the punishments in store for you to overtake you!"

Other suggested interpretations are:

(1) *Awlá laka* is a noun that implies a verb. It means: "There shall be evil upon evil for you."

(2) *Awlá* is an optative or invocatory verb in the past tense. It is derived from *waly*, which means "nearness, proximity, imminence." Its subject is an omitted pronoun whose antecedent is "destruction, doom." The letter *lām* in *laka* is *zāʾidah* (extra, redundant, semantically empty). The meaning is: "May your doom and destruction be soon and imminent."

(3) The subject of *awlá* is an omitted pronoun whose antecedent is "God." The letter *lām* in *laka* could be either *zāʾidah* or not.[1] In the first case, the meaning would be: "May God bring close to you what you dislike." In the second case, the meaning would be: "May God take you close to what you dislike."

(4) The meaning is: "It is more befitting and appropriate to blame you than not to." Parts of the original usage were omitted, and because of frequent usage, the abbreviated expression [*awlá laka*] has become synonymous with *al-wayl laka* (woe to you, shame on you). Given this transformation, it is no longer permissible to add and include the omitted parts.

(5) The meaning is: "May God destroy you by such destruction that is nearer to you than any other evil or destruction."

(6) *Awlá* is a comparative adjective that means "more deserving or most befitting." It is a predicate for an omitted subject that should be understood from the context. The implied meaning is: "The fire is most appropriate for you." In other words: "*You* are most befitting of the fire and belong to it. That is why it is more befitting of you as well."

Comment: These are implausible interpretations that suffer from contrivance. The last view comes close to our interpretation, but they are

1 If it is not *zāʾidah*, the letter *lām* (for, to, upon) is used to add the object of a transitive verb. As one can see, these subtle distinctions do not make any difference in the overall meaning of the verse, especially when translated into English. (Trans.)

not the same.

أَ يَحْسَبُ الْإِنْسانُ أَنْ يُتْرَكَ سُدىً ﴿٣٦﴾

(75:36) ***Does man suppose that he will be left forlorn*** **(sudá)*****?***

This verse begins to wrap up the sūrah by reiterating a verse at the beginning: *Does man suppose that We shall not assemble his bones?* (75:3). The rhetorical question in this verse indicates reproach. *Sudá* means *muhmal* (neglected, abandoned, left aimless). The meaning is: "Does the human being think that they are neglected and left on their own?" That would be the case if they were not to be resurrected after death, which would entail that they have no obligations to account for, and will face no retribution.[1]

أَ لَمْ يَكُ نُطْفَةً مِنْ مَنِيٍّ يُمْنى ﴿٣٧﴾

(75:37) ***Was he not a drop of emitted*** **(yumná, from imnāʾ)** ***semen?***

The antecedent of the pronoun "he" is *man* in the last verse. *Imnāʾ* of semen means its ejaculation into the womb.

ثُمَّ كانَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقَ فَسَوَّى ﴿٣٨﴾

(75:38) ***Then he became a clinging mass; then He created*** **[him]** ***and fashioned*** **[him],**

The meaning is: "The abovementioned person—or semen—then became a clot of blood. Then God apportioned and fashioned it by giving it a balanced and complete form."

فَجَعَلَ مِنْهُ الزَّوْجَيْنِ الذَّكَرَ وَ الْأُنْثى ﴿٣٩﴾

(75:39) ***and made of him the two sexes, the male and the female.***

God made *al-insān* (the human) of two sexes: male and female.

أَ لَيْسَ ذلِكَ بِقادِرٍ عَلى أَنْ يُحْيِيَ الْمَوْتى ﴿٤٠﴾

(75:40) ***Is He not able to revive the dead?***

The disbelievers rejected the resurrection on the account of mere unlikelihood. This verse argues against that by asserting God's omnipotence

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1 On a secondary level of application, the verse can provide insight into humankind's existential forlornness, despair and angst. (Trans.)

and pointing to the initial creation of the individual. It is certainly easier—not harder—to bring back something to life than to create it *ex nihilo*. We have repeatedly analyzed and discussed this argument under other similar verses.[1]

Examining Narrations

(1) Ibn ʿAbbās said: The Messenger of God faced a great intensity when he received revelation. He would start moving his lips and tongue in order to retain it, fearing that it may escape him. Thus God revealed: *Do not move your tongue with it to hasten it. Indeed its collection and its recitation are upon Us* (75:16-17). That is, it is upon us to gather it in your heart, and then to recite it. *And when We have recited it* (75:18): when We have revealed it to you; *follow its recitation* (75:19): listen and remain silent. *Then, its exposition is [also] upon Us* (75:19): We shall elucidate it through your tongue (another version: "We shall recite it"). From then on, when Gabriel descended upon the Messenger of God, he [the Prophet] would look down (another version: "he would give ear"). Once Gabriel left, he would recite [the message in whole], as promised by God.[2]

(2) Ibn ʿAbbās said: Whenever there was a revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet, he would hasten to recite it in order to retain it. Then this verse was revealed: *Do not move your tongue with it to hasten it* (75:16). Moreover, the Messenger of God did not know the end of a chapter (sūrah) until he received *bism Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm* (In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful) [marking the beginning of the next chapter].[3]

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1 See the author's exposition of verses 13:5, 17:49-51, 19:66-67, 21:104, 30:27, 36:78-81, 50:15, 56:57-62. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Ṭayālisī, Aḥmad, ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasāʾī, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn al-Anbārī's *al-Maṣāḥif*, al-Ṭabarānī, Ibn Mardawayh, Abū Nuʿaym's *al-Dalāʾil*, and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Dalāʾil*.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Mardawayh. The first part of this narration is also reported in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Ibn Jubayr.

Author's comment: There are further narrations which convey the same idea. However, as we stated in our exposition of the verse, this meaning does not clearly correspond to the verses.

(3) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *Rather, you love the immediate* (75:20): That is the present world. *And you neglect* (tadharūna) *the hereafter* (75:21): *Tadharūna* means *tadaʿūna* (you abandon, you forsake, you leave aside). *Some faces will be radiant* (nāḍirah) *on that day* (75:22): *Nāḍirah* means *mushriqah* (bright, shining). *Looking toward their Lord* (75:23): They will be looking at God's face, which means His mercy and blessings.

(4) Concerning *Some faces will be radiant on that day, looking* (nāẓirah) *toward* (ilá) *their Lord* (75:22-23) Imam al-Riḍā said: It means they will be bright, anticipating (*tantaẓiru*, from *intiẓār*) the reward of their Lord.[1]

Author's comment: Some have argued that *nāẓirah* (looking, seeing) cannot be interpreted as *muntaẓirah* (anticipating, awaiting, hoping) because the verse uses the preposition *ilá* (toward, to, upon), in order to make the meaning transitive, while *intiẓār* is transitive by itself and is used without such a preposition. *Majmaʿ al-bayān* has responded to this objection by quoting two poems [which use *naẓar* with *ilá*, while intending *intiẓār*]. The first one is by Jamīl b. Maʿmar:[2]

وَ إِذَا نَظَرْتُ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ مَلِكٍ وَ الْبَحْرُ دُونَكَ زِدْتَنِي نِعَمَا

Whenever I have looked toward thee (*naẓartu ilayka*),
O my king, who is unsurpassed by the sea,
Thou hast always renewed thy favor upon me.

And another poet has said:

إِنِّي إِلَيْكَ لِمَا وَعَدْتَ لَنَاظِرٌ نَظَرَ الْفَقِيرِ إِلَى الْغَنِيِّ الْمُوسِرِ

Indeed I'm looking (*nāẓir*) to (*ilá*) what you have promised,

1 *Al-ʿUyūn*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ibrāhīm b. Abī Maḥmūd. This is also narrated from Imam ʿAlī in *al-Tawḥīd*, *al-Iḥtijāj* and *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

2 The first poem is by urayḥ b. Ismāʿīl al-Thaqafī (d. 165 AH, 782 CE). The second one is by Jamīl b. Maʿmar (d. 83 AH, 702 CE). (Trans.)

As a poor man looks up to a rich one to assist.[1]

Likewise, *al-Kashshāf* has said that in this verse, the usage of *naẓar* instead of *intiẓār* is a figurative usage. This is a plausible interpretation.

(5) The Messenger of God said: "If the person at the lowest level of paradise were to look at their gardens, spouses, servants and couches, they would extend to a journey of a thousand years. And the one most honored by God will look at His face every morning and evening." Then he added: "*Some faces will be radiant* (nāḍirah) *on that day* (75:22): white and clear. *Looking toward their Lord* (75:23): They will look at His face every day."[2]

Author's comment: There are two possible ways to construe this narration: (1) It corresponds to what we said about "seeing" God in our exposition of the verse. (2) It means seeing God's attributes of action (*al-ṣifāt al-fiʿliyyah*) such as mercy, grace and beneficence. This is based on a precise sense of "face" (*wajh*): the "face" of something is an aspect of it by which it faces and meets other things. In the case of God, He faces His creation through His attributes [of action]. Accordingly, looking at God's mercy, grace, beneficence—and His other attributes—is tantamount to looking at His face.

(6) The Messenger of God said: They will look at their Lord in a way which cannot be described, which has no defining limit, and which has no known quality.[3]

Author's comment: This narration confirms our interpretation of "looking" as a spiritual vision with the heart, not physical sight with the eye. This narration should be used as a basis to interpret a number of narrations—reported through Sunni chains of transmission—which apparently suggest anthropomorphism. According to the above hadith, what is implied in the verse is not physical vision, because that is always limited.

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1 In these verses, "looking to" means looking forward to something with hope and anticipation. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Shaybah, ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, al-Ājurrī's *al-Sharīʿah*, al-Dāraquṭnī's *al-Ruʾyah*, al-Ḥākim, Ibn Mardawayh, al-Lālakāʾī's *al-Sunnah*, and al-Bayhaqī, on the authority of Ibn ʿUmar.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Anas b. Mālik.

(7) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *Nay! When it reaches the collar bones* (75:26): That is when the soul reaches up to the collar bone (*tarquwah*). *And it is said, "Where is the wizard?"* (75:27): The person [who is dying] will be told [with rebuke, by the angels], "Who has a charm to cure you [now]?" *And he realizes that it is the [time of] parting* (75:28): The person would know that this is the end.

(8) Once Imam al-Bāqir was asked about the verses: *and it is said, "Where is the wizard?" and he realizes that it is the [time of] parting* (75:27-28). He explained: This is the description of the human being. When death comes to them, they will inquire, "Is there a physician [to cure me]?" *And he realizes that it is the [time of] parting* (75:28): They know for sure that they are parting with their loved ones. *And one shank is intertwined with another shank* (75:29): This world will be intertwined with the hereafter. *Unto your Lord will be the driving that day* (75:30): The path leads to the Lord of the worlds.[1]

(9) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning: *and one shank is intertwined with another shank* (75:29): This world will be intertwined with the hereafter. *Unto your Lord will be the driving that day* (75:30): They will be driven toward God.

(10) ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm al-Ḥasanī says: I asked Imam al-Jawād concerning the verses: *You well deserve! Yes, you well deserve! Again, you well deserve! Yes, you well deserve!* (75:34-35). He explained: "God's is saying: May you be far from the good of this world, and may you be far from the good of the hereafter."[2]

Author's comment: This hadith can be matched with our interpretation of the verses, as well as some of the suggested views of the exegetes.

(11) Once the Messenger of God took Abū Jahl's hand and said to him, "You well deserve! Yes, you well deserve! Again, you well deserve! Yes, you well deserve!"[3]

Abū Jahl retorted, "What are you threatening me with? Neither you nor your Lord can do anything to me. Indeed I'm the most respected person in this land."

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Jābir.

2 *Al-ʿUyūn*, via its chain of narration.

3 In this context what is meant is: "Indeed it shall come to you! You are surely up for it! It is certainly imminent!" (Trans.)

Then the Almighty God revealed these verses [75:34-35] just as the Messenger of God had said.[1]

(12) Concerning *Does man suppose that he will be left forlorn?* (75:36) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It means not facing any reckoning, any punishment, or any questioning [of one's beliefs and deeds].

(13) Once A man told Imam al-Ṣādiq, "O Abā ʿAbd-Allāh! Our whole creation is rather bizarre."
The Imam inquired, "And why is that, for the love of God?"
"Because we are created to perish."
"My dear nephew," the Imam explained, "we are rather created to live forever. How could there be an end to a garden that never withers, and a fire that is never extinguished? Instead, you should say that we move from one abode to another."[2]

(14) When God revealed the verse, *Is He not able to revive the dead?* (75:40), the Messenger of God said: Yes indeed, O God, and glory belongs to Thee (*subḥānaka Allāhumma balá*).[3]

(15) It is narrated that whenever the Prophet recited verse 75:40, he would say: Yes indeed! And glory belongs to Thee O God.[4]

(16) When Imam al-Riḍā recited this sūrah, he would say at the end: Yes indeed, O God! Glory belongs to Thee[5] (*subḥānaka Allāhumma balá*).[6]

1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*. A similar account is quoted from a number of sources in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Qatādah.

2 *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Masʿadat b. Ziyād.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of from al-Barrāʾ b. ʿĀzib. The same has been narrated from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah and others.

5 This version of the expression is more accurate than the one with the conjunction "and" (letter *wāw*). (Trans.)

6 *Al-ʿUyūn*.

Chapter 76

al-Insan (The Mankind)

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Verses 1-22

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمنِ الرَّحِيمِ

هَلْ أَتى عَلَى الْإِنْسانِ حِينٌ مِنَ الدَّهْرِ لَمْ يَكُنْ شَيْئاً مَذْكُوراً ﴿١﴾ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسانَ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ أَمْشاجٍ نَبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْناهُ سَمِيعاً بَصِيراً ﴿٢﴾ إِنَّا هَدَيْناهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شاكِراً وَ إِمَّا كَفُوراً ﴿٣﴾ إِنَّا أَعْتَدْنا لِلْكافِرِينَ سَلاسِلَ وَ أَغْلالاً وَ سَعِيراً ﴿٤﴾ إِنَّ الْأَبْرارَ يَشْرَبُونَ مِنْ كَأْسٍ كانَ مِزاجُها كافُوراً ﴿٥﴾ عَيْناً يَشْرَبُ بِها عِبادُ اللَّهِ يُفَجِّرُونَها تَفْجِيراً ﴿٦﴾ يُوفُونَ بِالنَّذْرِ وَ يَخافُونَ يَوْماً كانَ شَرُّهُ مُسْتَطِيراً ﴿٧﴾ وَ يُطْعِمُونَ الطَّعامَ عَلى حُبِّهِ مِسْكِيناً وَ يَتِيماً وَ أَسِيراً ﴿٨﴾ إِنَّما نُطْعِمُكُمْ لِوَجْهِ اللَّهِ لا نُرِيدُ مِنْكُمْ جَزاءً وَ لا شُكُوراً ﴿٩﴾ إِنَّا نَخافُ مِنْ رَبِّنا يَوْماً عَبُوساً قَمْطَرِيراً ﴿١٠﴾ فَوَقاهُمُ اللَّهُ شَرَّ ذلِكَ الْيَوْمِ وَ لَقَّاهُمْ نَضْرَةً وَ سُرُوراً ﴿١١﴾ وَ جَزاهُمْ بِما صَبَرُوا جَنَّةً وَ حَرِيراً ﴿١٢﴾ مُتَّكِئِينَ فِيها عَلَى الْأَرائِكِ لا يَرَوْنَ فِيها شَمْساً وَ لا زَمْهَرِيراً ﴿١٣﴾ وَ دانِيَةً عَلَيْهِمْ ظِلالُها وَ ذُلِّلَتْ قُطُوفُها تَذْلِيلاً ﴿١٤﴾ وَ يُطافُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِآنِيَةٍ مِنْ فِضَّةٍ وَ أَكْوابٍ كانَتْ قَوارِيرَا ﴿١٥﴾ قَوارِيرَا مِنْ فِضَّةٍ قَدَّرُوها تَقْدِيراً ﴿١٦﴾ وَ يُسْقَوْنَ فِيها كَأْساً كانَ مِزاجُها زَنْجَبِيلاً ﴿١٧﴾ عَيْناً فِيها تُسَمَّى سَلْسَبِيلاً ﴿١٨﴾ وَ يَطُوفُ عَلَيْهِمْ وِلْدانٌ مُخَلَّدُونَ إِذا رَأَيْتَهُمْ حَسِبْتَهُمْ لُؤْلُؤاً مَنْثُوراً ﴿١٩﴾ وَ إِذا رَأَيْتَ ثَمَّ رَأَيْتَ نَعِيماً وَ مُلْكاً كَبِيراً ﴿٢٠﴾ عالِيَهُمْ ثِيابُ سُندُسٍ خُضْرٌ وَ إِسْتَبْرَقٌ وَ حُلُّوا أَساوِرَ مِنْ فِضَّةٍ وَ سَقاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ شَراباً طَهُوراً ﴿٢١﴾ إِنَّ هذا كانَ لَكُمْ جَزاءً وَ كانَ سَعْيُكُمْ مَشْكُوراً ﴿٢٢﴾

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

(76:1) *Has there been for man a period of time when he was nothing to be mentioned?*

(76:2) *Indeed We created man from a drop of a mixed fluid, which We transform. Then We made him endowed with hearing and sight.*

(76:3) *Indeed We have shown him the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful.*

(76:4) *Indeed We have prepared for the faithless chains, iron collars, and a blaze.*

(76:5) *Indeed the righteous drink from a cup seasoned with camphor,*

(76:6) *a spring where the servants of Allah drink, which they make to gush forth abundantly.*

(76:7) *They fulfill their vows and they fear a day whose ill will be widespread.*

(76:8) *And despite their love for it, they give the food to the needy, the orphan and the captive,*

(76:9) *[saying,] "We feed you only for the sake of Allah. We do not want any reward from you nor any thanks.*

(76:10) *Indeed we fear a frowning and fateful day from our Lord."*

(76:11) *So Allah has saved them from the ills of that day, and has met them with freshness and joy.*

(76:12) *And He shall reward them for their patience with a garden and [garments of] silk,*

(76:13) *reclining therein on couches. They will find in it neither any [scorching] sun, nor any [biting] cold.*

(76:14) *Its shades will be close over them and its clusters [of fruits] will be hanging low.*

(76:15) *They will be served around with vessels of silver and goblets of crystal*

(76:16) *—crystal of silver—[from] which they determine with a precise measure.*

(76:17) *They will be served therein with a cup of a drink seasoned with ginger,*

(76:18) *a spring in it, named Salsabīl.*

(76:19) *They will be waited upon by immortal youths, whom, when you see them, you will suppose them to be scattered pearls.*

(76:20) *When you see there, you will see bliss and a great estate.*

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(76:21) *Upon them will be cloaks of green silk and brocade and they will be adorned with bracelets of silver. Their Lord will give them to drink a purifying drink.*

(76:22) *"This is indeed your reward, and your endeavour has been well-appreciated."*

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Introduction & Commentary

This sūrah was revealed in Medina and consists of 31 verses. The sūrah begins with the creation of the human being after a period when they were not worthy of mention. They are then guided to the path, whether they choose to be grateful or ungrateful. God has prepared various punishments for the disbelievers, and myriad blessings for the righteous. Since the chapter takes eighteen verses to elaborate on their blessings, that becomes the primary theme of the sūrah.

The sūrah then reminds the Prophet that the Qur'an is a revelation and a reminder from God. Thus, he must have patience in obeying God's commands, should not follow the desires of the people, should remember the name of his Lord every morning and evening, and should spend some part of the night to prostrate and glorify Him extensively.

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This chapter is either entirely Medinan, or its first twenty-two verses are Medinan while the last nine verses are Meccan. Shia narrations from the Ahl al-Bayt agree that the sūrah was revealed in Medina. There are also *mustafiḍah* (multiple, diffused, numerous) Sunni narrations which confirm this view. Some have suggested that the chapter was entirely revealed in Mecca. We shall discuss this in detail under our upcoming examination of the narrations, by the will of God.

هَلْ أَتَى عَلَى الْإِنْسانِ حِينٌ مِنَ الدَّهْرِ لَمْ يَكُنْ شَيْئاً مَذْكُوراً ﴿١﴾

(76:1) ***Has*** **(hal)** ***there been for man a period*** **(ḥīn)** ***of time*** **(al-dahr)** ***when he was nothing to be mentioned?***

This is a rhetorical question which affirms the statement being questioned. The meaning is: "Indeed there has been for man…"[1] The word

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1 This is how we should interpret the view of some early exegetes, saying that the interrogative *hal* (has) at the beginning of this verse implies *qad* (indeed, surely). They did not mean, unlike what some other exegetes have understood, that *qad* is one of the lexical meanings of *hal*. (Auth.)

insān (man, human) in this verse denotes humankind as a species. Some exegetes have said that it means Adam in particular, but that is not compatible with the following verse: *Indeed We created man from a drop of a mixed fluid* (76:2). *Ḥīn* means "a period of time," whether it is short or long. *Dahr* means "a long time" without any specified beginning or end.

… nothing to be mentioned: Man was not a thing whose name would be mentioned when there was a mention of things. For instance, there could be a mention of earth, heaven, land, sea and so on, but not a mention of any human being. Since the person did not exist, their name could not be part of the list. In other words, "being mentioned" is a way of saying "being existent" as an actualized entity. Hence, the verse's expression—*he was nothing to be mentioned*—does not mean that man was nothing whatsoever, but it means that he was something, though that thing was not worthy of being mentioned. Put differently, the person existed, but not at a level to be mentioned. This interpretation is supported by the next verse: *Indeed We created man from a drop of a mixed fluid* (76:2), which shows that the material component of the person existed, but it had not yet developed into a human being as an actualized entity.

The overall theme and message of this verse and the following verses would also clarify what is intended here. The verses argue that the human being is an originated entity [as opposed to an eternal and independent being], which means that they must have had a Source and Creator. Indeed, they have a Lord Who has created them. Further, He has directed their affairs by endowing them with tools of cognition, such as hearing and sight, so that they may find their way to the right path, which they must pursue throughout their life. If they are ungrateful to this blessing, then they are doomed to an excruciating punishment. If they are grateful, they will end up in everlasting bliss.

The meaning is: "There was indeed some limited period of time—out of the unlimited span of time—when man's existence was not actualized, and therefore he was not among the beings or things that could be mentioned."

إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ نَبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ سَمِيعاً بَصِيراً ﴿٢﴾

(76:2) ***Indeed We created man from a drop*** **(nuṭfah)** ***of a mixed fluid*** **(amshāj),** ***which We transform*** **(nabtalīhi, from ibtilāʾ).** ***Then We made him endowed with hearing and sight.***

The original meaning of *nuṭfah* is "little water," but it is commonly used for the semen that is secreted from the male organs in the process of procreation. *Amshāj* is the plural of *mashīj*, *mashaj*, or *mashij*, meaning "mixed, mingled." It is used as an adjective for *nuṭfah*. There are two possible interpretations for this usage: (1) It indicates the various components of semen. (2) It refers to the blending of the male and female fluids [that is, the sperm and the ovum].

Ibtilāʾ means "transforming and modifying something from one state to another." For instance, it is used when gold is smelted and refined in a crucible. The verse talks about God's *ibtilāʾ* (transformation) of the human being, subsequent to their creation from semen. This refers to what is mentioned elsewhere in the Qur'an, that God creates and transforms semen into *ʿalaqah* (a clinging mass, a clot of blood), and then transforms *ʿalaqah* to *muḍghah* (a fleshy tissue, a lump of flesh), and so on through the other stages, until He gives it *another creation* (23:14).

Another suggested interpretation is: *Ibtilāʾ* means putting to test and trial through religious obligations. This view is rejected by the last part of the verse: *Then We made him* (fa-jaʿalnāhu) *endowed with hearing and sight*, where the letter *fāʾ* (so, then, therefore) indicates that being endowed with hearing and sight are *subsequent* to *ibtilāʾ*. Some have responded to this by saying that the verse involves a transposition (*taqdīm wa taʾkhīr*), where the implied meaning is: "We created him from a drop of a mixed fluid, *then* We made him endowed with hearing and sight, *so that* We may test him." However, this possibility is not worthy of attention.[1]

… Then We made him endowed with hearing and sight: The context of the verses—especially the next verse: *Indeed We have shown him the way…* (76:3)—suggests that this statement is made to show God's fostering, nurturing and management of humankind. Humans are endowed with hearing and sight to observe the signs of God which show the origin and the end, and to hear the message of truth which He has sent through messengers and scriptures. Thus, their hearing and sight would call them to pursue the way of truth, and to traverse the path of life with faith and righteous deeds. If they are steadfast on the path to which they are guided, they will arrive at eternal bliss. Otherwise, they will be doomed

1 This is because assuming a transposition in the verse requires some evidence and indication. (Trans.)

to everlasting punishment.

Instead of using a pronoun, the verse has explicitly repeated the word *insān* (man, human). This is meant to emphasize the fact that God is both their Creator and the Director of their affairs. The meaning is: "We have indeed created the human from a drop of a fluid that is a mixture of various constituents, while We transform them through several stages, from one state to another. Then We made them hearing and seeing, so that they may hear the divine message that is conveyed to them, and may see the divine signs that prove God's oneness, prophethood, and the hereafter."

إِنَّا هَدَيْناهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شاكِراً وَ إِمَّا كَفُوراً ﴿٣﴾

(75:3) ***Indeed We have shown him*** **(hadaynāhu, from hidāyah)** ***the way*** **(al-sabīl),** ***be he grateful or be he ungrateful.***

What is meant by *hidāyah* (guidance) in this verse is "showing the way to someone," not taking them to the destination. *Sabīl* is meant in its literal sense, which is "a way that leads to the desired goal," which would be the path of truth. One is grateful for a bounty if they use it in a way that demonstrates whom it is from. One is ungrateful if they use a blessing while denying and concealing whom it is from. As we explained under the verse: *and soon Allah will reward the grateful* (3:144), the reality of gratefulness is sincere servitude toward God.[1]

… be he **(immā)** ***grateful or be he*** **(immā)** ***ungrateful:*** Some exegetes have said that this final phrase is a description of *the way*.[2] However, it is a description for the pronoun "him" in the clause, *We have shown him*. The word *immā* (whether, either this or that, be this or that) is a partitive operator. The meaning is: "We have shown them the way, while they are divided into either being grateful or ungrateful." In other words: "They are shown the way, regardless of whether they fall into this category or the other."

… be he grateful or be he ungrateful: We can deduce two points from this expression:

(1) *The way* in this verse means the path and tradition that must be pursued during one's life in order to attain happiness in this life and the

1 See volume 7, pp. 51ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

2 The meaning would be: "We have shown them the way—both the way of gratefulness and the way of ungratefulness." (Trans.)

next. That is the way which leads one to the honorable station of divine proximity and nearness. This effectively boils down to the true religion, which is, according to God, the religion of submission [3:19]. This should also clarify the implausibility of the view that *the way* in this verse means the way out of the womb.

(2) The way which is shown to humankind is a path that is to be followed with volition and free will. One has the choice to respond to this guidance through either gratefulness or ungratefulness. One can adopt either of these qualities without any imposition or compulsion. The same idea is conveyed by the verse: *Then He made the way easy for him* (80:20).[1]

At the end of this chapter we read: *So let anyone who wills take the way toward his Lord. But you do not will unless it is willed by Allah* (76:29-30). The second verse does not say that you do not *act* unless it is willed by God [to imply compulsion], but it says that you do not *will* unless it is willed by God. Since the qualification pertains to the volition of the servants—not their actions—it does not negate their ability to exercise free will. Indeed, their voluntary actions stem from their will, which in turn is willed by God. We have repeatedly discussed this fine distinction in a number of places in this book.[2]

Hidāyah (guidance) in this verse means showing the way, which is a form of announcement, proclamation and notification. This type of divine guidance for humankind occurs in two forms:

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1 Another relevant verse is: *and We have shown him the two paths [of good and evil]* (90:10).

2 See verse 74:56 above, and verse 76:30 below. Also see volume 1, pp. 143 and 162ff of the English translation, under verses 2:21-25 and 2:26-27; volume 2, pp. 209ff and 271-272, under verses 2:153-157 and 2:164; volume 13, pp. 25ff and 81ff, under verses 6:9 and 6:35; volume 15, p. 65, under verses 7:10-25. This is the author's witty way of avoiding a deterministic interpretation of the verse. However, such literal meticulosity is not sufficiently strong to solve the problem of free will. Nor has it Qur'anic support. Indeed, the Qur'an considers *everything* to be subject to God's will—not only our will, but also our acts. The ultimate solution is to be sought in God's absolute oneness, not in a subtle distinction between human will and human action. This can be found in some of the author's discussions referenced above, as well as his exposition of verse 76:30 below. (Trans.)

(1) Intuitive guidance through one's *fiṭrah* (primal nature, innate disposition, pristine conscience). God inspires and directs the human being—through their original makeup and the faculties they are given—toward true beliefs and righteous acts. The Qur'an says: *by the soul and Him who fashioned it, and inspired it with [discernment between] its virtues and vices* (91:7-8). And more comprehensively: *So set your heart on the religion as a people of pure faith, the origination of Allah according to which He originated humankind. There is no altering Allah's creation; that is the upright religion, but most people do not know* (30:30).

(2) Verbal and external guidance through sending prophets, dispatching messengers, revealing scriptures, and legislating divine laws. Human history has always been supported by God's direction through the religious call that was brought by the prophets and messengers. This form of guidance confirms and reinforces God's intuitive guidance. The Qur'an says: *We have indeed revealed to you as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him… messengers, as bearers of good news and warners, so that humankind may not have any argument against Allah, after the [sending of the] messengers* (4:163-165).

The differences between these two kinds of guidance is that intuitive guidance is universal, without any exception. It is found equally in all humans without exception, since it is an inseparable property of their creation. True, it could, in some cases, be undermined or lose its effect due to certain factors such as the person's engrossment in the apparent means, which divert one's attention and preclude one from following the call of their reason and their divine intuition (*fiṭrah*). Another possible impediment is vices and evil habits, such obstinacy and hostility [against the truth], which prevent one from responding to the directives of their *fiṭrah*. The Qur'an says: *Have you seen him who has taken his desire to be his god and whom Allah has led astray knowingly, and set a seal upon his hearing and his heart, and put a blindfold on his sight? So who will guide him after Allah?* (45:23). What is meant by "guidance" in this verse is taking one to the destination, not merely showing them the way. The latter is in fact affirmed for the person because the verse says: *Allah has led astray knowingly* (45:23).

However, the case of verbal and external guidance, which consists of the religious call, is different. In principle, this type of guidance is directed at humankind collectively. It is available to any intelligent person

in the society. Anyone who chooses truth over falsehood can refer to it. Nonetheless, that does not mean that this type of guidance reaches every single member of the society, due to the limitations of the means and tools that are used in propagating the message. Given the variety of circumstances, times and places, it may be difficult to communicate these teachings to everyone. How could a single person convey a message to everyone else by himself or through others like him? That is very unlikely, if not impossible. The idea that the message certainly reaches the society as a whole is reflected in the verse: *And there is not a nation but a warner has passed in it* (35:24). The idea that not every individual necessarily receives the message is found in the verse: *That you may warn a people whose fathers were not warned, so they are oblivious* (36:6). If anyone receives the message and the truth becomes evident to them, then God's proof is complete against them [that is, they have no excuse for not following it]. But if the message does not reach someone in a way that unveils the truth for them, then God has classified them—through His grace—as *mustaḍʿaf* (disadvantaged, oppressed, abased). The case of such people is deferred to God: He may forgive them if He wills, or punish them if He wills. The Qur'an says: *Except the abased among men, women and children, who have neither access to any means nor are guided to any way* (4:98).

The same two forms of guidance make it obligatory upon one to follow the divine call, which directs one to the true path. On the one hand, one is is already equipped with signals and directives—embedded in one's pristine nature, intuition and conscience (*fiṭrah*)—which point the person to a certain set of beliefs and actions. On the other hand, there is an external call to the same principles made by the prophets and messengers. The growth and perfection of any being hinge upon the qualities and actions which are congruent with its nature, and match its innate disposition and faculties. That is why human happiness and perfection lie in following the divine religion, which is the same as living according to one's *fiṭrah* (primal nature, innate disposition, initial makeup), as confirmed by the rule of reason, and is endorsed by the message of the divine prophets and messengers.

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إِنَّا أَعْتَدْنا لِلْكافِرِينَ سَلاسِلَ وَ أَغْلالاً وَ سَعِيراً ﴿٤﴾

(76:4) *Indeed We have prepared* (aʿtadnā, from iʿtād) *for the faithless chains* (salāsil), *iron collars* (aghlālan), *and a blaze* (saʿīran).

Iʿtād means "to prepare, to arrange." *Salāsil* is the plural of *silsilah*,

meaning "a chain or rope by which a criminal is dragged." *Aghlāl* is the plural of *ghull*, which has been defined as "shackles that tie the hands to the neck." Al-Rāghib says: "*Ghull* is specifically used for a fetter that contains the limbs of a prisoner within itself." *Saʿīr* means "blazing and flaming fire." The meaning of the verse should be clear.

This verse describes the consequence of the ungrateful as referenced in the last verse: *be he grateful or be he an ungrateful* (75:3). The consequence of the ungrateful is mentioned before that of the grateful because it is more concise.

إِنَّ الْأَبْرارَ يَشْرَبُونَ مِنْ كَأْسٍ كانَ مِزاجُها كافُوراً ۝٥

(76:5) *Indeed the righteous* (al-abrār) *drink from a cup* (kaʾs) *seasoned* (mizājuhā) *with camphor* (kāfūran),

Kaʾs denotes "a cup or a vessel containing some drink." *Mizāj* (mixture, additive) is "a means and instrument for blending," just as *ḥizām* (girdle, strap, belt) is "a means and instrument for girding." *Kāfūr* (camphor) is a known substance. It is also used figuratively for anything that is cool and fragrant. Some have said that it is the name of a fountain in paradise.

Abrār is the plural of *barr*, which is a *ṣifah mushabbahah* derived from *birr*, meaning *iḥsān* (excellence, virtue, good).[1] *Barr* is someone who does good deeds without desiring any gain from it—any reward, appreciation or recognition. They do good *because* it is good, not because some benefit would accrue to them as a result of it. And if their ego and personal preferences find that good deed difficult, they would patiently oppose their ego and desires, and would fulfill the good deed. They would do so because the act is good in itself, such as observing a vow, or because it is beneficial to others, such as feeding those needy servants of God.

It must be noted that there is no virtue or righteous deed unless it is accompanied by faith in God, His Messenger, and the Last Day. This is reflected in many verses, such as: *They never have had faith. So Allah has made their works fail* (33:19). Accordingly, *abrār* believe in God, His

1 A *ṣifah mushabbahah* (also called *ṣifah mushbihah*) is an adjective that is similar to an active participle (*ism al-fāʿil*). It serves as an adjective, and indicates the establishment, subsistence, and strength of a quality in the subject. In this case it means "firmly pious, most excellent, highly virtuous." (Trans.)

Messenger, and the Last Day. And since their faith is coupled with spiritual growth and insight, they regard themselves as servants of their Lord, Who has created them and directs their affairs. They are not in charge of any gain or loss for themselves. They see it incumbent upon themselves not to will anything but the will of their Lord, and not do anything except what pleases Him. They give priority to His will over their own, and act for Him even if it means enduring the burdens of obedience, and opposing their own desires and inclinations. They do whatever they do for the sake of God, which makes them sincere servants of God at the level of actions.

The above qualities of the righteous are deduced from their Qur'anic descriptions in this chapter, such as: *a spring where the servants of Allah drink* (76:6); *We feed you only for the sake of Allah* (76:9); *And He shall reward them for their patience* (76:12). These traits can also be inferred from their description in the verse: *Righteousness is not to turn your faces to the east or the west; rather, righteousness is [personified by] those who have faith in Allah…* (2:177). We discussed the meaning of *birr* in our exposition of verse 2:177,[1] and shall discuss it further under the verse: *Nay! The record of the righteous is indeed in ʿIliyyūn* (83:18).

Indeed the righteous will drink…: The verse describes the state of the *righteous* in the hereafter, in contradistinction with the last verse, which describes the eternal condition of the faithless: *Indeed We have prepared for the faithless…* (76:4). The *righteous* will abide in paradise and indulge in a drink that is mingled with camphor, which is cool and fragrant.

عَيْناً يَشْرَبُ بِها عِبادُ اللَّهِ يُفَجِّرُونَها تَفْجِيراً ﴿٦﴾

(76:6) *a spring* (ʿaynan) *where the servants of Allah drink* (yashrabu bihā, from shurb), *which they make to gush forth abundantly* (tafjīran).

The *righteous* are described as *the servants of Allah*, which indicates that they have donned the honorific garment of servitude, and have lived up to its implications. This is because the verse has a context of praise and positive connotation.[2] *Tafjīr* of a spring means "splitting the earth for the

1 See volume 2, pp. 316ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

2 The word ʿ*aynan* (spring, fountain) is *manṣūb* in terms of inflection, which can have two possible interpretations: (1) It is due to the omission of a particle that assigns the oblique case (called *nazʿ al-khāfiḍ*). The implied meaning is: "From a spring…" where there is an omitted preposition *min* (from, of) at

spring to flow." The righteous make a spring gush forth merely through their will and desire. This is because the realization and indulgence of heavenly pleasures hinge on nothing beyond the will of its inhabitants. The Qur'an says: *There they will have whatever they will* (50:35). The last verse and this verse, as we said above, describe how the righteous will enjoy heavenly drinks in the hereafter. This is how the exegetes have interpreted the verses. Exegetes have also offered numerous and diverse interpretations concerning the words and the morphology of these two verses. Interested readers should refer to lengthy books of *tafsīr*.

Perhaps it is more plausible to say that the rewards described in these two verses are based on the embodiment of deeds (*tajassum al-aʿmāl*). That is, they express the reality of the good deeds of the righteous. The inner reality of the acts mentioned below—fulfilling one's vows and feeding the needy for the sake of God [76:7-9]—is getting to drink from brimming cups that are seasoned with camphor, from a fountain that will spring out through their righteous deeds. Their deeds are in the form of actions in this world, but their realities will manifest to them in the everlasting paradise. In this sense, the two verses would be comparable to the verse: *Indeed We have put iron collars around their necks, which are up to the chins, so their heads are upturned* (36:8).

A subtle piece of evidence that supports this interpretation is a consistent use of verbs in the present tense in these verses. The verb *drink* is used in these two verses in the present tense as *yashrabūna* (76:5) and *yashrabu bihā* (76:6), not in the future tense as *sa-yashrabūna* and *sa-yashrabu bihā*. We see the same present tense used to describe their actions in the following verses: *They fulfill* (76:7), *they fear* (76:7), *They give the food* (76:8). In this light, we can maintain the apparent meaning of *they make to gush forth abundantly* (76:6) as the act of bringing out a spring by employing its appropriate tools [of righteous deeds in this world, and not merely by one's will in paradise].

يُوفُونَ بِالنَّذْرِ وَ يَخافُونَ يَوْماً كانَ شَرُّهُ مُسْتَطِيراً ﴿٧﴾

the beginning of the verse. (2) It is the object of an omitted verb that denotes specification [for emphasis]. The implied meaning is: "I specifically mean (*akhuṣṣu*) a spring…" It is said that *shurb* (drinking) is transitive by itself, which means that the letter *bāʾ* (by, with, through) in *bihā* is *zāʾidah* (extra, redundant, semantically empty). (Auth.)

(76:7) ***They fulfill their vows and they fear a day whose ill will be widespread*** **(mustaṭīran).**

Mustaṭīr is an *ism al-fāʿil* (nominative substantive, active participial noun) derived from the verb *istaṭāra*, which means "to fully pervade and spread in all directions." *Istaṭāra* is synonymous with *ṭāra* (to fly, to soar), but conveys a more emphasized and exaggerated meaning, as some have pointed out. When something like the fire or the morning grows to its maximum, it is said that it *istaṭāra* (has fully spread). What is meant in this verse—which is about the Day of Resurrection—is that the intensity, fears and punishments of that day will be at their utmost degree.

They fulfill their vows…: This phrase conveys its apparent meaning, concerning conventional vows. Some have said that it means fulfilling the convictions and resolutions of their hearts to act upon their religious obligations and follow the shariah in all matters. However, this would be a deviation of the meaning from its apparent sense without any supporting evidence.

وَ يُطْعِمُونَ الطَّعامَ عَلى حُبِّهِ مِسْكِيناً وَ يَتِيماً وَ أَسِيراً ﴿٨﴾

(76:8) ***And despite their love for it, they give the food*** **(yuṭʿimūna al-ṭaʿām)** ***to the needy, the orphan and the captive,***

Apparently *ṭaʿām* (food) is the antecedent of the pronoun "it" in *their love for it*. What is meant by "love" here is a strong inclination toward the food due to their intense need of it. This theme is supported by the verse: *You will never attain virtue until you spend out of what you love* (3:92). Here are two other suggested interpretations:

(1) The antecedent of the pronoun "it" is God, meaning that they donate food only out of love for God, not for the sake of reward.

Comment: This is not acceptable because the sincerity of their intention is already expressed in the next verse, which narrates from them: *We feed you only for the sake of Allah* (76:9).[1]

(2) The antecedent of the pronoun "it" is the act of feeding (*iṭʿām*), which is inferred from the verb *yuṭʿimūna* (they feed).[2]

Comment: This is also implausible. The problem with this view is that the love of feeding is of no virtue for which one may be praised. And

1 The meaning is: "They feed others out of their love for God." (Trans.)

2 The meaning is: "They feed others out of their love for feeding." (Trans.)

if it is interpreted as feeding willingly and without any hesitation, then that would be against the apparent meaning of the text. Hence, it is most apparent to say that *food* is the antecedent of the pronoun "it."[1]

The meanings of *miskīn* (needy, poor) and *yatīm* (orphan) are conventionally known. *Asīr* (prisoner, captive) also denotes its conventional meaning, which is someone who is captured from the enemy in a war. Here are some other suggested meanings for *asīr*:

(1) Muslims who were taken captive in the Battle of Badr.
(2) Someone who is under arrest and/or held in a jail [like a convict].
(3) A slave.
(4) A married woman.

Comment: All of these are unwarranted impositions on the verse.

It should be noted that the theme of these verses is to present a narrative of a group of believers, called *al-abrār* (the righteous, the virtuous, the pious). The verses unveil some of their deeds—namely, fulfilling their vows and feeding the needy, the orphan and the captive—and praise them for these deeds and promise them splendid rewards. This means that the story mentioned in the verses is the cause of revelation (*sabab al-nuzul*) of the verses. This is unlike the context of other verses which present a topic hypothetically, discuss its benefits, and then promise a reward for it.

The fact that there was a captive among those whom these righteous individuals fed, is clear evidence for the verses having been revealed in Medina. This is because Muslims started taking captives only after the Prophet's migration to Medina, where they could confront the infidels and the polytheists, not before that.

إِنَّما نُطْعِمُكُمْ لِوَجْهِ اللَّهِ لا نُرِيدُ مِنْكُمْ جَزاءً وَ لا شُكُوراً ۝٩

(76:9) ***[saying,] "We feed you only for the sake* (wajh) *of Allah. We do not want any reward from you nor any thanks.***

Wajh (lit. face) is an aspect of something by which it faces and meets other things. The "face" of God is His attributes of action (*al-ṣifāt al-fiʿliyyah*), through which He bestows benefits upon His creation. Some examples of these attributes would be His act of creation, His provision of sustenance, and His direction of affairs. In short, it means God's universal

1 The meaning is: "Notwithstanding their personal interest in their food, they donate it to others." (Trans.)

mercy which supports the existence of all beings and events. Accordingly, doing something for God's face means seeking to benefit from His mercy and trying to please Him. This should be done through focusing on His mercy and pleasure alone, and relinquishing any hope or desire for any reward from any other source. That is why the righteous interpreted their first statement—*We feed you only for the sake of Allah*—by adding: *We do not want any reward from you nor any thanks*.

On a second level of meaning, God's face would be His essential attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-dhātiyyah*), which are the source and origin of His attributes of action along with all the good that emanate from them in the world. At this level, acting for God's face means performing an act out of love for God because He is *the* Beautiful, without any qualification. In other words, it means serving God because He is worthy of being served and worshiped.

There are several verses in the Qur'an which mention seeking the face of God as one's objective in what one does, such as: *Content yourself with the company of those who supplicate their Lord morning and evening, desiring His Face* (18:28); *as you do not spend but to seek Allah's face* (2:272). There are also other verses which convey the same meaning with other words: *Yet they were not commanded except to worship Allah, dedicating their faith to Him as men of pure faith* (98:5); *So supplicate Him, putting exclusive faith in Him* (40:65); *Look! Pure religion is for Allah only* (39:3).

***… We do not want any reward* (jazāʾan) *from you nor any thanks* (shukūran):** *Jazāʾ* (reward, retribution, compensation) means "reciprocating an act by something equivalent to it." If it is a good act, then its compensation would be good; and if it is evil, then evil. *Jazāʾ* would generally include compensation for both act and speech. But since it is mentioned in contradistinction with *thanks* in this verse, it specifically means practical reciprocation in return for their act of feeding. *Shukr* and *shukūr* mean "remembering and revealing a favor with one's heart, speech, or action." Given its juxtaposition with *reward*, what is meant here is verbal praise and gratitude.

… "We feed you only for the sake of Allah…": This is a statement by the righteous to those whom they fed: the needy, the orphan and the captive. There are two possible interpretations for this statement: (1) It is what they literally spoke. In that case, God is narrating their words, with an implied "they said" or "saying" at the beginning of the verse. What they meant by

this statement was to comfort the recipients, and to reassure them that their donation will not be followed by any humiliation or abuse (*minnah*). (2) It is an expression of what they held and intended in their heart, called *lisān al-ḥāl* (language of condition or state). God admires them since He is well aware of the sincere orientation and the exclusive concentration of their hearts on Him.

إِنَّا نَخَافُ مِنْ رَبِّنا يَوْماً عَبُوساً قَمْطَرِيراً ﴿١٠﴾

(76:10) ***Indeed we fear a frowning and fateful*** **(qamṭarīran)** ***day from our Lord."***

The Day of Resurrection is figuratively described as *frowning*. It means that the day will unfold for the wrongdoers with utmost severity. *Qamṭarīr* has been defined as "very difficult and formidable." Here the righteous justify what was narrated from them in the last verse: *We feed you only for the sake of Allah…* (76:9). The reason why they have dedicated their deeds only for the sake of God out of sincere servitude is that they fear such a tremendous day. However, they do not mention that day exclusively as the object of their fear, but they also include God into the picture: *a day from our Lord*. This is consistent with their motivation being only directed toward God's face. Accordingly, they do not fear anyone else, just as they have no hopes in anyone, but their fear and hope are directed toward their Lord alone. They are afraid of the Day of Resurrection only because it is a day appointed by their Lord to reckon the deeds of His servants and pay them for what they have earned.

In a previous verse we read: *and they fear a day whose ill will be widespread* (76:7), which identifies the day as their object of fear. This does not contradict the current verse, because the speaker in verse 76:7 is God, where He had already ascribed to Himself the difficulties of that day: *Indeed We have prepared for the faithless chains…* (76:4).[1] In short, the fear mentioned in this verse pertains to the plane of actions, on the basis that all servants will be held accountable for their actions. This is because God has the right of servitude over all humans, regardless of any station that they may reach. The Qur'an says: *Indeed to Us will be their return. Then, indeed, their reckoning will lie with Us* (88:25-26).

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1 In other words, putting verses 76:4 and 76:7 together, we can deduce that these servants are afraid of that day *because* it is prepared by God, which means that they are ultimately fearful of their Lord alone. (Trans.)

فَوَقاهُمُ اللَّهُ شَرَّ ذلِكَ الْيَوْمِ وَ لَقَّاهُمْ نَضْرَةً وَ سُرُوراً ﴿١١﴾

(76:11) ***So Allah has saved them*** **(fa-waqāhum, from wiqāyah)** ***from the ills of that day, and has met them*** **(laqqāhum)** ***with freshness*** **(naḍratan)** ***and joy*** **(surūran).**

Wiqāyah means "protection from harm." When someone meets, encounters or welcomes another person with a certain object or quality, the verb *laqqá yulaqqī* is used with the letter *bāʾ* (by, with).[1] *Naḍrah* means "radiating with wellness, energy and happiness; resplendent; healthy-complexioned." *Surūr* (happiness, joy) is the antonym of sorrow and grief. The meaning is: "God has protected and delivered them from the evil of that day, and has received them with radiance and joy, meaning that they shall be fair-complexioned and delighted on that day." This is comparable to the verse: *Some faces will be resplendent on that day* (75:22).

وَ جَزاهُمْ بِما صَبَرُوا جَنَّةً وَ حَرِيراً ﴿١٢﴾

(76:12) ***And He shall reward them for their patience with a garden and [garments of] silk,***

Patience here includes the three forms of it: (1) Patiently bearing the pains of afflictions. (2) Patiently enduring the difficulties of obedience. (3) Patiently abstaining from the temptations and pleasures of sins. Since they dedicated themselves to the "face" and satisfaction of their Lord in their life [76:9], they gave priority to His will over their own preferences. Thus they were patient in the face of calamities and ordeals that He decreed for them; were patient in abiding by His commands; and were patient in avoiding what He prohibited—in spite of their own desires and personal preferences. As a result, God replaced the hardships and difficulties that they had faced with blessings and peace.

مُتَّكِئِينَ فِيها عَلَى الْأَرائِكِ لا يَرَوْنَ فِيها شَمْساً وَ لا زَمْهَرِيراً ﴿١٣﴾

(76:13) ***reclining therein on couches*** **(al-arāʾik).** ***They will find in it neither any [scorching] sun, nor any [biting] cold*** **(zamharīran).**

Arāʾik is the plural of *arīkah* (couch, throne), which means "something where one reclines." *Zamharīr* means "bitter cold." The meaning is:

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1 The letter *bāʾ* is not used in this verse, but the author has taken it to be implied. (Trans.)

"They will receive the above rewards while being in a state of reclining on couches in paradise, where they will neither see a sun to be bothered by its heat, nor experience any severe cold to cause them discomfort."

وَ دانِيَةً عَلَيْهِمْ ظِلالُها وَ ذُلِّلَتْ قُطُوفُها تَذْلِيلاً ﴿١٤﴾

(76:14) ***Its shades*** **(ẓilāluhā)** ***will be close*** **(dāniyah, from dunuww)** ***over them and its clusters*** **(quṭūfuhā)** ***[of fruits] will be hanging low.***

Ẓilāl is the plural of *ẓill* (shade, shadow). "Its shades being close to them" means that they will be enveloped by the shades. Hence, closeness (*dunuww*) in this verse implies breadths and extension. *Quṭūf* is the plural of *qiṭf*, which means "picked fruit." The fruits hanging low for them means that the fruits will be completely under their control, such that they can pick them as they wish, without any impediment or difficulty.

وَ يُطافُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِآنِيَةٍ مِنْ فِضَّةٍ وَ أَكْوابٍ كانَتْ قَوارِيرَا ﴿١٥﴾

(76:15) ***They will be served around with vessels*** **(bi-āniyah)** ***of silver and goblets*** **(akwāb)** ***of crystal***

Āniyah is the plural of *inā*ʾ, meaning "vessel, container." It is similar in structure to *aksiyah*, which is the plural of *kisā*ʾ (robe, cloak). *Akwāb* is the plural of *kūb*, which is "a liquid jar without any handle or spout." This verse refers to young servants circumambulating the righteous with vessels and jars filled with drinks, as we shall see below in the verse: *They will be waited upon by immortal youths…* (76:19).

قَوارِيرَا مِنْ فِضَّةٍ قَدَّرُوها تَقْدِيراً ﴿١٦﴾

(76:16) ***—crystal of silver—[from] which they determine with a precise measure.***

This verse is an interpretative substitution for *crystal* at the end of the last verse. It is said that *crystal of silver* is a vivid analogy to show that the crystal is as pure as silver, not that it is made of silver literally. Alternatively, the verse involves an omission, where the implied meaning is: "crystal *with the purity* of silver." The antecedent of the pronoun "they"—in *which they determine*—is the righteous inhabitants of paradise. What is meant is that they will determine the size and capacity of the abovementioned vessels and goblets as they wish. They will be served by vessels that are adjusted to exactly how much they want, not any less or more. God says:

There they will have whatever they will (50:35); *they make to gush forth abundantly* (76:6).

Another possibility is that the antecedent of the pronoun "they" is the waiting servants, which is understood from the last verse: *They will be served around* (76:15). Then it would mean that the servants would adjust the size of the vessels and goblets as the righteous would desire. Both the content and the amount of their drink will be according to their desire.

وَ يُسْقَوْنَ فِيها كَأْساً كانَ مِزاجُها زَنْجَبِيلاً ﴿١٧﴾

(76:17) ***They will be served therein with a cup of a drink seasoned with ginger,***

It is said that the people at the time [that is, the immediate audience of the Qur'an] were fond of ginger in their drinks. That is why the Qur'an promises it to the righteous. And of course, the ginger of paradise would be far more fragrant and pleasant than worldly ginger.

عَيْناً فِيها تُسَمَّى سَلْسَبِيلاً ﴿١٨﴾

(76:18) ***a spring in it, named Salsabīl.***

There is an implied omission at the beginning of this verse, which could be either: (1) "*From* a spring…"; or (2) "*I specifically mean* a spring…" Al-Rāghib has interpreted *salsabīl* as "a spring that is accessible, pleasant and fluent, with a strong current."

وَ يَطُوفُ عَلَيْهِمْ وِلْدانٌ مُخَلَّدُونَ إِذا رَأَيْتَهُمْ حَسِبْتَهُمْ لُؤْلُؤاً مَنْثُوراً ﴿١٩﴾

(76:19) ***They will be waited upon by immortal*** **(mukhalladūn)** ***youths, whom, when you see them, you will suppose them to be scattered pearls.***

Their young servants will be *mukhallad* (immoral, perpetual, eternal) meaning that their freshness, effervescence and radiance will never subside. Some have interpreted it as wearing a *khiladah*, which is a type of earring. Comparing them to *scattered pearls* can refer to the following aspects: (1) They will have a very pure complexion. (2) Their faces will be radiating. (3) They will reflect the light of one another. (4) They will be present and dispersed throughout the sittings of the people of paradise.

وَ إِذا رَأَيْتَ ثَمَّ رَأَيْتَ نَعِيماً وَ مُلْكاً كَبِيراً ﴿٢٠﴾

(76:20) ***When you see*** **(raʾayta)** ***there*** **(thamma)**, ***you will see*** **(raʾayta)**

bliss and a great estate.

Thamma (there) is exclusively used as a *ẓarf makān* (locative container, adverbial noun of place). That is why the first instance of the word *raʾayta* in the verse has been interpreted as casting a look somewhere. The meaning would be: "There, in paradise, if you cast a glance around, you will see such bliss that is beyond description, and such great estate that is beyond measure."

Others have said that *thamma* is annexed to an omitted particle *mā* (what). The implied meaning would be: "When you see *what is* there, you will see such bliss and a great estate." Such usage is permitted by the Kufan grammarians, but not by the Basrans. In this respect, the verse would be comparable to the verse: *Certainly what was* (mā) *between you have been severed* (6:94).[1]

عالِيَهُمْ ثِيابُ سُندُسٍ خُضْرٌ وَ إِسْتَبْرَقٌ وَ حُلُّوا أَساوِرَ مِنْ فِضَّةٍ وَ سَقاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ شَراباً طَهُوراً ﴿٢١﴾

(76:21) ***Upon them will be cloaks of green silk* (sundus)** ***and brocade* (istabraq)** ***and they will be adorned with bracelets of silver. Their Lord will give them to drink a purifying drink.***

The plural pronouns in this verse refer to the righteous; the verse describes their condition in paradise. *Green* is the adjective of *cloaks*, which functions as the subject of the sentence. *Sundus* has been interpreted as "a finely woven fabric of silk," as opposed to *istabraq*, which is "a thickly woven silk." Both terms are Arabicized [from a foreign language].

… and they will be adorned* (ḥullū, from taḥliyah)** ***with bracelets* (asāwir)** ***of silver…: *Taḥliyah* is synonymous with *tazyīn* (adornment, decoration). *Asāwir* is the plural of *siwār*, which is well-known (bracelet, armlet). According to al-Rāghib, it is an Arabicized form of [the Persian] *dastwārah*.

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1 The particle *mā* (what, what was) is not mentioned in the text of verse 6:94, but is understood from the context. In the first interpretation, "there" (*thamma*) is the container where the seer is positioned and the act of seeing occurs. In the second interpretation, it is the object of seeing. Both interpretations effectively reduce to the same meaning, albeit the second one is slightly more apparent. The English translation is made compatible with both. (Trans.)

… Their Lord will give them to drink a purifying* (ṭahūran) *drink: That is a drink which will thoroughly cleanse them of all defilement. What is meant by defilement here is the defilement of inadvertence to God, and the veil of not being oriented toward Him.[1] They are completely mindful of their Lord, and that is why they are entitled to praise Him, as the Qur'an says: *and their concluding call will be, "All praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds"* (10:10). As we discussed in our exegesis of Sūrah al-Ḥamd, only the chosen servants of God (*al-mukhlaṣūn*) are capable of praising God, which can be deduced from the verses: *Clear is Allah of whatever they allege [about Him],—[all] except Allah's exclusive servants* (37:159-160).[2]

… Their Lord will give them to drink…: God does not mention any intermediaries involved here, but ascribes the act of giving them the drink directly to Himself. This is superior to all other blessings in paradise. Perhaps this is some of the "more" that is mentioned in the verse: *There they will have whatever they wish, and with Us there is yet more* (50:35).

إِنَّ هذا كانَ لَكُمْ جَزاءً وَ كانَ سَعْيُكُمْ مَشْكُوراً ﴿٢٢﴾

(76:22) ***"This is indeed your reward, and your endeavour has been well-appreciated."***

This verse refers to what God will say as He grants them their rewards. It could also involve an omitted verb at the beginning, where the implied meaning would be: "They will be told: This is indeed your reward…"

… and your endeavour has been well-appreciated: This is a declarative statement which implies a non-assertive or illocutionary meaning.[3] God is expressing His gratitude for their pleasing efforts and accepted deeds. This shall be such an elegant, promising and relieving expression to their hearts.

It is noteworthy that in the other Qur'anic descriptions of paradise,

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1 *Ṭahūr* can also be interpreted as "very pure," as most English translators have understood. This would match the Qur'anic verses which describe the drinks of paradise as being free from any headache or stupefaction. Nevertheless, it can be argued that something at the utmost degree of purity would also be purifying. The only other usage of *ṭahūr* in the Qur'ān—in verse 25:48—can also bear both meanings. (Trans.)

2 See volume 1, p. 48 of the English translation, under verse 1:2. (Trans.)

3 In other words, it means: "I am thankful to you for your efforts." (Trans.)

there is a mention of heavenly wives—like wide-eyed houris—as one of the most significant pleasures in paradise. However, in this verse there is no mention of that. We can perhaps deduce from this difference that there was some female presence among the righteous about whom these verses were revealed. *Rūḥ al-maʿānī* says:

> Based on the account that this chapter was revealed about the Prophet's Household (Ahl al-Bayt), a subtle point is that God makes no reference to wide-eyed houris. He only mentions *immortal youths* (76:19) as a courtesy to the Prophet's jewel, Fāṭimah al-Batūl.

Examining Narrations

(1) It is narrated from ʿIkrimah and al-Ḥasan b. Abī al-Ḥasan: In Mecca God revealed Chapter 96 (*iqraʾ bism rabbika*), then 68 (*nūn*), 73 (al-Muzzammil)… And in Medina He revealed Chapter 83 (al-Muṭaffifīn), then 2 (al-Baqarah), 3 (Āl-i ʿImrān), 8 (al-Anfāl), 33 (al-Aḥzāb), 5 (al-Māʾidah), 60 (al-Mumtaḥanah), 4 (al-Nisāʾ), 99 (*idhā zulzilat*), 57 (al-Ḥadīd), 47 (Muḥammad), 13 (al-Raʿd), 55 (al-Raḥmān), 76 (*hal atá ʿalá al-insān*)…[1]

(2) Ibn ʿAbbās said: Whenever the beginning of a chapter was revealed in Mecca, it was recorded there [as a Meccan sūrah], but then God would add to it as He willed. The first chapter of the Qur'an that was revealed was Chapter 96 (*iqraʾ bism rabbika*), then 68 (*nūn*), 73 (*yā ayyuhā al-muzzammil*)… Then the following chapters were revealed in Medina: 2 (al-Baqarah), then 8 (al-Anfāl), 3 (Āl-i ʿImrān), 33 (al-Aḥzāb), 60 (al-Mumtaḥanah), 4 (al-Nisāʾ), 99 (*idhā zulzilat*), 57 (al-Ḥadīd), 47 (al-Qitāl), 13 (al-Raʿd), 55 (al-Raḥmān), 76 (al-Insān)…[2]

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1 Al-Suyūṭī's *al-Itqān*, on the authority of al-Bayhaqī's *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwah*, via its chain of narration. The exact same series of chapters is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās, reported in in al-Suyūṭī's *al-Itqān*, on the authority of al-Bayhaqī's *al-Dalāʾil*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Mujāhid. The difference is that the second account also includes three Meccan chapters that were missing from ʿIkrimah and al-Ḥasan's narration: Chapters 1 (al-Fātiḥah), 7 (al-Aʿrāf) and 19 (Kāf-Hāʾ-Yāʾ-ʿAyn-Ṣād).

2 Al-Suyūṭī's *al-Itqān*, on the authority of Ibn al-Ḍurays' *Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān*, via

(3) Ibn ʿAbbās said: Sūrah al-Insān was revealed in Medina.[1]

(4) Imam ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib said: I asked the Prophet concerning the reward of [reciting] the Qur'an. He told me the rewards of each sūrah one by one, in the order of their revelation. The first sūrah that was revealed to him in Mecca was Chapter 1 (Fātiḥat al-Kitāb), then Chapter 96 (*iqraʾ bism rabbika*), 68 (*nūn*)… And the first sūrah that was revealed in Medina was Chapter 2 (al-Baqarah), then 8 (al-Anfāl), 3 (Āl-i ʿImrān), 33 (al-Aḥzāb), 60 (al-Mumtaḥanah), 4 (al-Nisāʾ), 99 (*idhā zulzilat*), 57 (al-Ḥadīd), 47 (Muḥammad), 13 (al-Raʿd), 55 (al-Raḥmān), 76 (*hal atá*)…[2]

(5) Al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥasan Abū ʿAbd-Allāh b. al-Ḥasan[3] said: This chapter is entirely Medinan, and was revealed about ʿAlī and Fāṭimah.[4]

(6) Concerning the verse, *And despite their love for it, they give the food…* (76:8) Ibn ʿAbbās said: This verse was revealed with reference to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and Fāṭimah, the daughter of God's Messenger.[5]

Author's comment: The verse [76:8] is in the same context as the rest of the verses before and after it; the verses in the first section of the sūrah are all connected. Therefore, if this verse was revealed with reference to them, we can infer that the rest of the set was also revealed in Medina.

(7) Ibn ʿAbbās said: Once al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn fell sick. The Messenger of God went to visit them, along with a group of

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its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿUthmān b. ʿAṭāʾ Khurāsānī, on the authority of his father.

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn al-Ḍurays, Ibn Mardawayh and al-Bayhaqī.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of al-Ḥākim, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Saʿīd b. Musayyib.

3 He is known as al-Ḥasan al-Muthallath (the Third Ḥasan), and was a companion of Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq. His father was also named al-Ḥasan (known as al-Ḥasan al-Muthanná, the Second Ḥasan), who was the son of Imam al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib. (Trans.)

4 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī's *Tafsīr*.

5 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh.

people. They told ʿAlī, "O Abā al-Ḥasan, why don't you make a vow for [the cure] of your sons?" Thus ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, and their maid Fiḍḍah, vowed to fast for three days if the two boys recovered from their illness. They healed, but the family did not have anything [to prepare for fasting].

ʿAlī borrowed three *ṣāʿs* of barley from a Jewish man named Shamʿūn al-Khaybarī. Fāṭimah grounded one *ṣāʿ* the first day,[1] and baked five loaves of bread from it for the five of them. When they sat down to break their fast, a mendicant showed up at the door and called, "*Al-salām ʿalaykum* O household of Muḥammad! I'm a poor man among the Muslim poor. Feed me, so that God may feed you with heavenly blessings!" They chose to give priority to him over themselves. Thus they spent that night with only water, and started the next day fasting. At the end of the second day, when they sat down to break their fast, an orphan showed up at the door. Again, they gave priority to him over themselves. And on the third day, a captive came to them, and they did likewise.

The fourth day ʿAlī took al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn by the hand, and went to see the Messenger of God. He saw them trembling like chicks due to starvation, and said, "It's so distressing for me to see you in this condition." He went home with them, where he found Fāṭimah in her praying niche (*miḥrāb*), her stomach joined to her back, and her eyes sunken. The scene distressed the Prophet. At that point, Gabriel descended and said, "Take this [sūrah] Muḥammad! God greets you for having such a household." Then he recited the sūrah [to the Prophet].[2]

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1 Each *ṣāʿ* is about 3 kg. Therefore, each bread was made of about 600 grams of barley. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Kashshāf*. This account is reported through several chains of narration, on the authority of ʿAṭāʾ, from Ibn ʿAbbās. Al-Baḥrānī has reported it in *Ghāyat al-marām* from the following sources: (1) Abū al-Muʾayyad al-Muwaffaq b. Aḥmad's *Faḍāʾil Amīr al-Muʾminīn*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Mujāhid, from Ibn ʿAbbās. (2) The same book, via another chain of narration, on the authority of al-Ḍaḥḥāk, from Ibn ʿAbbās. (3) Al-Juwaynī's *Farāʾid al-simṭayn*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Mujāhid, from Ibn ʿAbbās. (4) Al-Thaʿlabī, via its chain of narration, on the authority

(8) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Fāṭimah had some barley which they mixed with oil and baked. When they sat down to eat, a poor man showed up and said, "I'm poor! May God show you mercy!" So ʿAlī got up and gave him one third of the food. Before long, an orphan came up and said, "I'm an orphan! May God show you mercy!" Again, he [ʿAlī] gave him one third. Then a captive came and said, "I'm a captive! May God show you mercy!" He [ʿAlī] gave him the other one third. Thus they did not taste that food [at all]. God revealed these verses about them, and the verses continue to be applicable to any believer who does the same for the sake of the Almighty God.[1]

Author's comment: As one can see, the story is abridged in this narration.

(9) In one of his debates with the Companions after ʿUmar's death, Imam ʿAlī said, "I ask you by God! Is there anyone but me among you, for whom and whose children it was revealed: *Indeed the righteous drink from a cup seasoned with camphor* (76:5), until

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of Abū Ṣāliḥ, from Ibn ʿAbbās. It is also reported in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-Wāḥidī's *Tafsīr*. (Auth.)

Abū al-Muʾayyad al-Muwaffaq b. Aḥmad is known as Akhṭab Khwārazm, and his book *Faḍāʾil Amīr al-Muʾminīn* is also known as *al-Manāqib*. Numbers (1) and (4) are both quoted from this book, both through al-Thaʿlabī, but via different chains of transmission. Al-Juwaynī, in number (3), is also known as al-Ḥamwīnī [also recorded as al-Ḥammūyanī and al-Ḥamawī], especially in Shia sources, where he is attributed to his grandfather Ibn Ḥammūyah. (Trans.)

1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of his father, on the authority of ʿAbd-Allāh b. Maymūn. Al-Baḥrānī has narrated this in *Ghāyat al-marām* from the following sources [in addition to *Tafsīr al-Qummī*]: (1) Al-Mufīd's *al-Ikhtiṣāṣ*, via its chain of narration. (2) Al-Ṣadūq's *al-Amālī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Mujāhid, from Ibn ʿAbbās. (3) Al-Ṣadūq's *al-Amālī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Salamat b. Khālid, from Imam Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad, from his father. (4) Muḥammad b. al-ʿAbbās b. Māhyār's *Tafsīr*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ibī Kathīr al-Zubayrī, from Ibn ʿAbbās. It is also narrated from Aṣbagh b. Nubātah in *al-Manāqib* [of Ibn Shahr-Āshūb].

the end of the sūrah?"
"No," they confessed.[1]

(10) Part of Imam ʿAlī's argument against Abū Bakr was: "I ask you by God! Who is intended in the verse, *They fulfill their vows and they fear a day whose ill will be widespread* (76:7), I or you?"
Abū Bakr admitted, "Rather, it refers to you."[2]

(11) Ibn ʿUmar said: Once a man from Abyssinia went to the Messenger of God, who told him, "Ask so that you may understand." The man said, "O Messenger of God! You [Arabs] are given advantage over us by your color, your physique, and prophethood. Now, if I believe in what you believe in, and act like you act, do you think that I will be with you in paradise?"
"Of course," the Prophet replied. "By the One in Whose hand is my life, the brightness of the black will be visible in paradise from a distance of a thousand years."
Then the Prophet continued, "Whoever says, *lā ilāh illā Allāh* (there is no god but God), will have a covenant with God. And whoever says, *subḥān Allāh wa bi-ḥamdihi* (glory and praise be to God), 124,000 rewards will be written for them."
Then this sūrah was revealed to him, from *Has there been for man a period of time…* (76:1) up to: *and a great estate* (76:20).
The Abyssinian inquired, "Will my eyes see in paradise what your eyes will see?"
"Yes," the Prophet confirmed. The man fell ill [because of hearing this] and died soon after.
Ibn ʿUmar added: I saw that the Messenger of God place him in his grave with his own hands.[3]

(12) A black man came and started asking the Prophet several questions about *tasbīḥ* (saying *subḥān Allāh*, declaring God's glory and transcendence) and *tahlīl* (saying *lā ilāh illā Allāh*, declaring God's absolute oneness). ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb snapped at him, "Stop! You're exhausting the Messenger of God [with too many

1 *Al-Iḥtijāj*.

2 *Al-Khiṣāl*.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Ṭabarānī, Ibn Mardawayh and Ibn ʿAsākir.

questions]."

But the Prophet said, "*You* stop, ʿUmar!" Then this chapter was revealed to the Messenger of God: *Has there been for man a period of time…* (76:1). When it reached the verses that describe paradise, the black man let out a shriek—and his soul with it. The Prophet said, "He died out of yearning for paradise."[1]

(13) The Messenger of God recited this sūrah—*Has there been for man a period of time…* (76:1)—which had been just revealed to him. When he reached the verses that describe paradise, a black man who was there let out a shriek—and his soul with it. "It was yearning for paradise," the Messenger of God commented, "which pulled out the soul of your friend."[2]

Author's comment: Assuming the authenticity of these accounts, they imply that the revelation of the sūrah and the story of the man *coincided*. But they do not mean that the man's story was a *cause* of revelation (*sabab al-nuzul*) of the of the sūrah. This is clearly reflected in the last narration. In short, there is no discordance between those three narrations and the view that the sūrah was revealed with reference to the Ahl al-Bayt. Moreover, Ibn ʿUmar's narration [number 11] can be evidence for the occurrence of this story in Medina, because apparently he was present when the event happened, and he was eleven years old when he migrated to Medina.

(14) Ibn ʿAbbās said: Sūrah al-Insān was revealed in Mecca.[3]

Author's comment: This narration contradicts the *mustafīḍah* (multiple, diffused, numerous) narrations from Ibn ʿAbbās that we cited above, saying that the sūrah was revealed in Medina, and that it was revealed with reference to the Ahl al-Bayt.[4] Besides, the theme and context of the verses—particularly *They fulfill their vows…* (76:8) and *they give the*

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad's *al-Zuhd*, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Muṭarrif, on the authority of "a reliable narrator."

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Wahab, on the authority of Ibn Zayd.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Naḥḥās. This is an abridged version of a lengthy account narrated by al-Naḥḥās in *al-Nāsikh wa al-mansūkh*, which is also reported in *al-Itqān*.

4 See hadith numbers 1-3 and 6-8 above. (Trans.)

food… (76:8)—show that the sūrah pertains to an incident that actually occurred. And as we said before, a clear sign that the verses are Medinan is the mention of a *captive* among those whom they fed [76:8]. Muslims did not have any captives in Mecca.

Here is a summary of what some exegetes have said:

> The narrations differ concerning this sūrah being Meccan or Medinan. It is more preferred to consider it Meccan. Rather, it is patent from its theme and context that it was among the earliest chapters revealed to the Prophet in Mecca at the outset of his mission (called *al-ʿatāʾiq*). This can be substantiated by the following observations:
>
> (1) The chapter involves a very elaborate depiction of physical heavenly blessings and excruciating punishments [76:4-22].
>
> (2) It orders the Prophet to patiently follow God's command, to not obey any sinner or disbeliever, to be steadfast with the truth that is revealed to him, and to refrain from reconciliation with polytheists [76:23-26]. These were commands that were revealed in Mecca, where the Prophet and his Companions were persecuted, as one can see in Chapters 68 (al-Qalam), 73 (al-Muzzammil) and 74 (al-Muddaththir).
>
> Accordingly, the possibility that the sūrah was revealed in Medina should be dismissed.

The above view is not plausible, and its two observations can be contested as follows:

(i) Including a very elaborate description of physical heavenly blessings and excruciating punishments is not something restricted to Meccan chapters. Thus it does not prove the sūrah being revealed there. For instance, Chapters 55 (al-Raḥmān) and 22 (al-Ḥajj) are Medinan, as we saw in the narrations that list the chronological order of revelation, yet they include fairly elaborate depictions of blessings and punishments, much more than what is found in the current chapter.

(ii) The sūrah's commands to the Prophet—to be patient, to not obey the sinners and disbelievers, to not be pliable with them, and to be steadfast with the truth that is revealed to him—appear in the second section of the sūrah, starting from the verse, *Indeed We, We have gradually sent down to you the Qur'an, a gradual descent* (76:23). It is quite likely that this part of the sūrah—which has a distinct theme, tone and context from

the first part—was revealed in Mecca. This can be confirmed by the many narrations that we cited above, which identify only the first section of the chapter as being revealed with reference to the Ahl al-Bayt. Accordingly, the first part of the sūrah would be Medinan, the second part Meccan.

Even if we assume that the chapter was entirely revealed at once, enjoining patience to the Prophet is not particular to Meccan chapters. A counter example is the verse: *Content yourself with the company of those who supplicate their Lord morning and evening, desiring His Face, and do not loose sight of them, desiring the glitter of the life of this world. And Do not obey him whose heart We have made oblivious to Our remembrance, and who follows his own desires, and whose conduct is [mere] profligacy* (18:28). This verse was revealed in Medina as per the narrations. As one can see, it very closely resembles the verses of the current chapter in terms of meaning and context. The reader is encouraged to refer to this verse and reflect on it.

Moreover, the persecutions that the Prophet endured in Medina—from the hypocrites, those with sickness in their hearts, and the weak unrefined believers—was no less than what he faced in Mecca from the polytheists. The accounts of his life bear witness to this. Finally, there is no reason to assume that sin and disbelief were restricted to Meccan polytheists. There were also disbelievers elsewhere, and the Qur'an ascribes sin to all Muslims in several verses, such as: *Each man among them bears [the onus for] his share in the sin* (24:11); *But someone who commits an iniquity or sin and then accuses an innocent person of it, is indeed guilty of calumny and a flagrant sin* (4:112).

(15) Once Imam al-Bāqir was asked about the meaning of the verse, *he was nothing to be mentioned* (76:1). He replied: It means that he *was* something, but was not [worthy of being] mentioned.[1]

(16) Imam al-Bāqir said: He [the human being] was mentioned[2] in the knowledge of God, but was not mentioned in His creation.[3]

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1 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-ᶜAyyāshī, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ᶜAbd-Allāh b. Bukayr, on the authority of Zurārah.

2 "Mentioned" in these narrations and the verse can also be translated as "remembered, found, present." (Trans.)

3 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-ᶜAyyāshī, via its chain of narration,

Author's comment: This means that the human being existed in the divine knowledge, and then they were created externally. Thus they became something to be mentioned among what God has created.

(17) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: He [the human being] was preordained, but not mentioned.[1]

Author's comment: This hadith conveys the same meaning as the last one.

(18) Concerning the same verse [76:1] *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: He [the human being] was neither to be found in the knowledge, nor in the mention. Another hadith says, "He was to be found in the knowledge, but not in the mention."

Author's comment: The first hadith[2] means that the person was neither to be found in the *people's* knowledge, nor in their mention and remembrance (*dhikr*). The second hadith means that the person was found in *God's* knowledge, but was not mentioned or remembered among the *people*.

(19) Concerning the words, *a mixed fluid* (amshāj), *which We transform* (76:2) Imam al-Bāqir said: This means a mixture of the fluids of the man and the woman.[3]

(20) Once Imam al-Ṣādiq was inquired about the verse: *Indeed We have shown him the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful* (76:3). He explained: He either takes the guidance, which makes him grateful; or he leaves it, which makes him ungrateful.[4]

(21) Concerning the same verse [76:3] Imam al-Ṣādiq said: It means

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on the authority of Saʿīd al-Ḥadhdhāʾ. A similar hadith to this is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq, on the authority of ʿAbd al-Aʿlá Mawlá of Āl-i Sām.

1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Mālik al-Juhanī.

2 This expression shows that the author assumed all of al-Qummī's quotes and interpretations to be narrations from the Infallibles. That is why he has included them in his examination of the narrations. (Trans.)

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

4 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ḥumrān b. Aʿyan. This is also narrated from Imam al-Bāqir by al-Qummī in his *Tafsīr*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr.

We made him know [the path], whether he takes it or leaves it.[1]

(22) The Messenger of God said: Every child is born with a pristine nature (*fiṭrah*) [of monotheism, and they maintain it] until they are capable of expressing it. When they express it, they become either grateful or ungrateful. And the Almighty God knows best [what is in the hearts].[2]

(23) Imam al-Bāqir said: *a spring where the servants of Allah drink, which they make to gush forth abundantly* (76:6): That is a fountain in the house of the Messenger of God [in paradise], which will flow toward the homes of the prophets and the believers. *They fulfill their vows* (76:7): This refers to ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn and their maid. *And they fear a day whose ill will be widespread* (mustaṭīran) (76:7): It [*mustaṭīr*] means frowning and contracted faces [in anguish and anxiety].[3] *And despite their love for it, they give the food* (76:8): That is despite their appetite for the food and desiring it themselves. *To the needy* (76:8): one of the Muslim mendicants; *the orphan* (76:8): one of the Muslim orphans; *and the captive* (76:8): one of the captives of the polytheists [living among the Muslims]. When they feed them, they say: "*We feed you only for the sake of Allah. We do not want any reward from you nor any thanks*" (76:9). By God, they did not say this to them, but this is what they intended in their hearts, and God revealed what they held within. They said: "We do not want any reward by which you compensate us, nor any thanks by which you praise us. We are feeding you only for the sake of God, seeking His reward."[4]

(24) Al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī] said: There were polytheist captives [among Muslims] when it was revealed: *And despite their love for it, they give the food to the needy, the orphan and the captive* (76:8).[5]

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1 *Al-Tawḥīd*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ḥamzah b. al-Ṭayyār.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad and Ibn al-Mundhir, on the authority of Jābir b. ʿAbd-Allāh.

3 This is apparently an interpretation of *ʿabūsan qamṭarīran* (frowning and fateful) in verse 76:10. See hadith number 25 below. (Trans.)

4 Al-Ṣadūq's *al-Amālī*, via its chain of narration, from Imam al-Ṣādiq.

5 *Al-Durr al-manthūr* on the authority of Saʿīd b. Manṣūr, Ibn Abī Shaybah,

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Author's comment: This account implies that the verse was revealed in Medina.

(25) Concerning the words, *a frowning and fateful day* (yawman ʿabūsan qamṭarīran) (76:10) the Prophet said: What is between the eyes [that is, the forehead] will contract [in anguish and anxiety].[1]

(26) Imam al-Bāqir said in a hadith about paradise: Its fruits will be dangling close to them, as God says: *Its shades will be close over them and its clusters [of fruits] will be hanging low* (76:14). They are so close that a believer can access any kind of fruit that they crave with their mouth while they are reclining [on their couch]. Every type of fruit will say to a friend of God, "O friend of God! Partake of me first before you eat another one."[2]

(27) Concerning *immortal* (mukhalladūn) *youths* (76:19) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It [*mukhalladūn*] means *musawwarūn* (wearing bracelets and/or armlets).

(28) ʿAbbās b. Yazīd says: One day I was visiting Imam al-Ṣādiq, where I asked him: "Tell me about the verse: *When you see there, you will see bliss and a great estate* (76:20). What is this estate that the Almighty God has glorified as *great*?"
He explained, "Once God admits the people of paradise into paradise, He will send an emissary to one of His friends. The emissary will encounter some doorkeepers at his gate, who will tell him, 'Wait here until we ask permission for you!' Hence, the Lord's emissary cannot access them without their permission. That is the meaning of the verse: *When you see there, you will see bliss and a great estate* (76:20)."[3]

(29) Concerning the verse, *When you see there, you will see bliss and*

Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Mardawayh. Similar accounts to this are narrated from: (1) Qatādah, on the authority of ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd. (2) Ibn ʿAbbās, on the authority of Ibn al-Mundhir, on the authority of Ibn Jurayḥ. (3) Ibn ʿAbbās, on the authority of ʿAbd al-Razzāq and Ibn al-Mundhir.

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr* on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Anas b. Mālik.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Isḥāq al-Madanī.

3 *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, via its chain of narration.

a great estate (76:20) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: It neither terminates nor perishes.[1]

(30) Concerning *Upon them will be cloaks of green silk* (76:21) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: The cloaks will be [hanging] above them, whereby they will wear them [with ease].[2]

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Discussion on the Reality of the Human Being According to the Qur'an

In this sensible body, which we call the human, there is evidently some life principle which the source of consciousness and volition. The Qur'an calls it *rūḥ* (spirit) in the story of Adam's creation, which is the creation of the human being. In other places it is called *nafs* (soul). God says: *So when I have proportioned him and have breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down in prostration before him* (15:29, 38:72); *Then He proportioned him and breathed into him of His Spirit* (32:9).

At first glance, these two verses suggest that the human being is a dichotomous reality made of spirit and body, just as the dough is made of flour and water. When the spirit is coupled with the body, they compose a living human being. When the spirit leaves the body, the person dies. However, these verses must be interpreted and understood in the light of another verse: *Say: "You will be taken away by the angel of death, who has been charged with you"* (32:11). What the Angel of Death seizes is one's spirit, and that is the totality of one's reality, indicated by the pronoun "you" in the verse. This verse clarifies that the spirit is not a part of the whole. Therefore, what is meant by the blowing of the spirit into the body [in verses 15:29 and 32:9] is that the very body is evolved into a human being, not that two different entities are pieced together.

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The spirit and the body are not independent of one another, neither in their essence nor in their properties. The human being continues to exist as the same reality whether the spirit and the body are together, or the spirit leaves the body. This idea [that the human is a single whole] is also conveyed in these verses: *Certainly We created man from an extract of clay. Then We made him a drop of [seminal] fluid [lodged] in a secure abode. Then We created the drop of fluid as a clinging mass. Then We*

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

created the clinging mass as a fleshy tissue. Then We created the fleshy tissue as bones. Then We clothed the bones with flesh. Then We produced him as [yet] another creature (23:12-14). These verses show that what evolves into *another creature* is the same drop of seminal fluid which evolves into a clinging mass, then into a fleshy tissue, and then into bones.

Another verse in this regard is: *Has there been for man a period of time when he was nothing to be mentioned?* (76:1). Instead of an unconditional negation of man's existence, what the verse negates is the person being *mentioned*. This means that the person was *something*, but not a thing to be *mentioned*. For instance, the person was clay or sperm, but was not yet qualified to be mentioned as a person so-and-so. Later they become who they are.

Hence, the Qur'an's view is that the oneness of the human being is *real* [not conventional or figurative]. The human being is a single reality which is the source of all its physical, psychological and spiritual functions. And that reality is immaterial in its essence, as one can infer from verses like: *Say: "You will be taken away by the angel of death, who has been charged with you"* (32:11); *Allah takes the souls at the time of their death* (39:42); *Then We produced him as [yet] another creature* (23:14). We already had a discussion on this.[1]

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1 See volume 2, pp. 221ff of the English translation, under verses 2:153-157. (Trans.)

Verses 23-31

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنا عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ تَنْزِيلاً ﴿٢٣﴾ فَاصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ وَ لا تُطِعْ مِنْهُمْ
آثِماً أَوْ كَفُوراً ﴿٢٤﴾ وَ اذْكُرِ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ بُكْرَةً وَ أَصِيلاً ﴿٢٥﴾ وَ مِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَاسْجُدْ لَهُ
وَ سَبِّحْهُ لَيْلاً طَوِيلاً ﴿٢٦﴾ إِنَّ هؤُلاءِ يُحِبُّونَ الْعاجِلَةَ وَ يَذَرُونَ وَراءَهُمْ يَوْماً ثَقِيلاً
﴿٢٧﴾ نَحْنُ خَلَقْناهُمْ وَ شَدَدْنا أَسْرَهُمْ وَ إِذا شِئْنا بَدَّلْنا أَمْثالَهُمْ تَبْدِيلاً ﴿٢٨﴾ إِنَّ هذِهِ
تَذْكِرَةٌ فَمَنْ شاءَ اتَّخَذَ إِلى رَبِّهِ سَبِيلاً ﴿٢٩﴾ وَ ما تَشاؤُنَ إِلاَّ أَنْ يَشاءَ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
كانَ عَلِيماً حَكِيماً ﴿٣٠﴾ يُدْخِلُ مَنْ يَشاءُ فِي رَحْمَتِهِ وَ الظَّالِمِينَ أَعَدَّ لَهُمْ عَذاباً
أَلِيماً ﴿٣١﴾

(76:23) *Indeed We, We have gradually sent down to you the Qur'an, a gradual descent.*
(76:24) *So submit patiently to your Lord's command, and do not obey any sinner or disbeliever among them,*
(76:25) *And remember the name of your Lord morning and evening,*
(76:26) *and prostrate to Him for a watch of the night and glorify Him the night long.*
(76:27) *Indeed they love the immediate, and neglect a weighty day behind them.*
(76:28) *We created them and tautened their joints, and whenever We will, We shall replace them with others like them.*
(76:29) *This is indeed a reminder. So let anyone who wills take the way toward his Lord.*
(76:30) *But you do not will unless it is willed by Allah. Indeed Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise.*
(76:31) *He admits whomever He wills into His mercy, and as for the wrongdoers, He has prepared for them a painful punishment.*

Introduction & Commentary

The previous verses discussed the reward of the righteous, including the eternal bliss and the grand estate that is assigned to them for their patience in the way of God. These verses address the Prophet and order him to wait for God's command, and not obey the sinners and disbelievers who are fascinated with the transitory life, who cling to this world, and who are neglectful of the hereafter. That would include the polytheists, as well as other unbelievers, hypocrites, and those who pursue their base desires. The verses also command the Prophet to remember his Lord, to prostrate before Him, and to glorify Him at all times. The verses then generalizes the address to all of his nation by saying: *This is indeed a reminder. So let anyone who wills take the way toward his Lord* (76:29).

This is how the second part of the chapter [76:23-31] can be connected to the first group of the verses and its theme. Nevertheless, the current set of verses resemble Meccan verses in terms of their overall message and context. Granted that they are Meccan, it means that the first section of the chapter [76:1-22] was revealed in Medina, and the rest in Mecca.

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنا عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ تَنْزِيلاً ﴿٢٣﴾

(76:23) ***Indeed We*** **(innā)**, ***We*** **(naḥnu)** ***have gradually sent down*** **(nazzalnā)** ***to you the Qur'an, a gradual descent*** **(tanzīlan).**

The gradual revelations of the Qur'an are entirely from God alone. They are neither what Satan inspires, nor based on personal desires. The verse emphasizes this message in three ways: (1) It begins by *innā* (indeed We). (2) Even though the word *innā* includes the pronoun "We," the pronoun is repeated once again as *naḥnu* (We). (3) The verb *nazzalnā* (We have gradually sent down) is confirmed by the word *tanzīlan* (a gradual descent) at the end, which serves as an an absolute object (*mafʿūl muṭlaq*).

فَاصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ وَ لا تُطِعْ مِنْهُمْ آثِماً أَوْ كَفُوراً ﴿٢٤﴾

(76:24) ***So submit patiently to your Lord's command, and do not obey any sinner or disbeliever among them,***

The letter *fā*ʾ (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of this verse indicates that this statement is drawn as a conclusion to the message of the last verse. Given that God is the One Who has sent down the Qur'an upon the Prophet, it follows that any command in the Qur'an is God's

command, which means something that must be followed. The meaning is: Since its revelation is from Us, any command in it is your Lord's command. Therefore you must patiently obey it: *So submit patiently to your Lord's command*."[1]

… and do not obey any sinner or disbeliever **(kafūran)** ***among them:*** Since the conjunction "or" is used in a prohibitive statement here, it serves to expand the prohibition. Whether the person is only a sinner or a disbeliever, or both, the Prophet should not obey them. Apparently, what is meant by 'sinner' is one who is accustomed to sinning, and *kafūr* is one who is deeply rooted in kufr (disbelief, ungratefulness). Therefore, the verse includes not only disbelievers, but also the sinners [among believers].

The verse first orders the Prophet to submit patiently to God's command, and then forbids him from obeying the sinners and the disbelievers. This order of expression suggests that the subsequent prohibition explains what is meant by the initial command. The meaning is: "Do not obey the sinners and disbelievers among them when they invite you to their sin and disbelief, because their sin and disbelief are against the command of your Lord."

Instead of saying, "do not obey them" [using a pronoun or a proper noun], the verse refers to them using their attributes of sinning and disbelief. This style of expression implies justification. That is, the Prophet is prohibited from obeying them *because* of their sin and disbelief. The two qualities serve to justify an absolute prohibition, not a qualified one. It does not mean that the Prophet should not obey them only when they call him to their sin and disbelief, but he should strictly abstain from obeying them whatsoever.

وَ اذْكُرِ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ بُكْرَةً وَ أَصِيلاً ﴿٢٥﴾

(76:25) ***And remember the name of your Lord morning*** **(bukrah)** ***and evening*** **(aṣīlan),**

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1 The word *ḥukm* (command) could also mean "rule, judgment." In that case, the verse is ordering the Prophet to remain patient with his people and their persecution until God's judgment about them comes to pass, either in this world or the next. In other words, *li-ḥukm Rabbika* (for your Lord's command) means *ḥattá yaḥkuma Rabbuka* (until your Lord judges). This can be confirmed by other similar Qur'anic usages of *ḥukm*, as in verses 10:109, 7:87, 52:48, 68:48. (Trans.)

The verse means: "Remember your Lord persistently," where what is meant by remembrance is the prayer (*ṣalāh*). *Bukrah* is synonymous with *ghduww* (morning), and *aṣīl* is synonymous with *ʿashī* (evening, afternoon).

وَ مِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَاسْجُدْ لَهُ وَ سَبِّحْهُ لَيْلاً طَوِيلاً ﴿٢٦﴾

(76:26) *and prostrate to Him for a watch of* (min) *the night and glorify Him the night long.*

The preposition *min* (of, from) is partitive. What is meant by prostration here is the prayer (*ṣalāh*). It is possible to say that this verse and the last one—about remembering God in the morning and the afternoon and prostrating to Him during some part of the night—correspond to the Morning (*fajr*), the Afternoon (*ʿasr*), the Sunset (*maghrib*) and the Evening (*ʿishāʾ*) obligatory prayers. This can confirm the view that these verses were revealed in Mecca, before the five daily prayers were legislated with the revelation of the verse: *Maintain the prayer from the sun's decline till the darkness of the night, and [observe particularly] the dawn recital* (17:78). Hence, this verse and the last one can be compared to the verses: *Maintain the prayer at the two ends of the day, and during the early hours of the night* (11:114); *and celebrate the praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before the sunset, and glorify Him in watches of the night and at the day's ends* (20:130).[1] According to some exegetes, assuming that the word *aṣīl* (76:25) is applicable to the entire afternoon, it would include both the Noon (*ẓuhr*) and the Afternoon prayers. This is an acceptable possibility.[2]

… and glorify Him the night long: What is meant by glorification here is the Night Prayer (*ṣalāt al-layl*). There are two possible interpretations for the linguistic construction of this phrase: (1) The preposition *fī* (in, during) is implied, and "long" is a descriptive—not restrictive—adjective for night.[3]

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1 These verses (76:25-26, 11:114, 20:130) have been matched with the Meccan period before the legislation of the five daily prayers because they apparently do not include all the five timings. (Trans.)

2 Another plausible view is that these times are not literally or specifically, but they are a way of saying, "at all times." One must strive to be constantly mindful of the Absolute. This is perhaps what is meant when the Qur'an talks about remembrance (*dhikr*) or glorification (*tasbīḥ*) in general, as opposed to prayer (*ṣalāh*) in particular. (Trans.)

3 The implied meaning is: "Glorify God during the night, which is long." (Trans.)

(2) "Long" is an adjective for an omitted absolute object (*mafʿūl muṭlaq*). The implied meaning is: "Glorify God at night, a long glorification."

إِنَّ هؤُلاءِ يُحِبُّونَ الْعاجِلَةَ وَ يَذَرُونَ وَراءَهُمْ يَوْماً ثَقِيلاً ﴿٢٧﴾

(76:27) ***Indeed they love the immediate, and neglect*** **(yadharūna)** ***a weighty day behind them*** **(warāʾahum).**

This verse justifies the abovementioned commands and prohibitions. The pronoun "they" refers to all sinners and disbelievers, who were mentioned indefinitely in a prohibitive statement [in verse 76:24].[1] *The immediate* means worldly life. The *day* is the Day of Resurrection. It is metaphorically described as heavy, indicating its gravity and intensity. It is as though the day is a heavy burden that is difficult to endure.

The Day of Resurrection is *ahead* of them, but it is called *behind* them in the sense that it will inevitably overtake them, since the word *warāʾ* (behind, beyond) implies encompassment (*iḥāṭah*). Another possibility is that it is *behind them* in the sense that they have disregarded it, assuming that *yadharūna* implies *iʿrāḍ* (turning away, averting).

The meaning is: "Submit patiently to the command of your Lord, establish the prayer, and do not obey the sinners and disbelievers among them, because they love this transitory life. Thus all their work is for this world. They neglect a grievous day that is ahead of them—or they neglectfully throw it behind their backs, while it is an intense day that they will certainly meet."

نَحْنُ خَلَقْناهُمْ وَ شَدَدْنا أَسْرَهُمْ وَ إِذا شِئْنا بَدَّلْنا أَمْثالَهُمْ تَبْدِيلاً ﴿٢٨﴾

(76:28) ***We created them and tautened*** **(shadadnā, from shadd)** ***their joints*** **(asrahum)*****, and whenever We will, We shall replace them with others like them.***

Shadd (strengthen, make firm, tie) is the antonym of *fakk* (release, disconnect, untie). *Asr* is a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund) which is originally synonymous with *shadd* (tightening, firmly connecting). There are two possible interpretations for its usage here: (1) It denotes the means and instruments of connecting and tying. The meaning would be: "We have tautened their joints with sinews, nerves and muscles." (2) It denotes

1 The use of the indefinite form (*nakirah*) in a negative or prohibitive statement implies inclusion and universality. (Trans.)

the object that is connected and tied. The meaning would be: "We have made firm the tie between their various limbs and organs, such that they all work together and constitute a single human body."

… and whenever We will, We shall replace them with others like them: Whenever We wish, We can substitute them with other people, who are no less human than them. That is, We can take them away and bring another group like them to take their place. That is when God destroys one generation and brings to existence another. Another suggested meaning is: "We can replace their worldly existence with the hereafter." However, this is not apparent from the theme and context of the verse.

This verse is effectively an answer to an implied question (called a prolepsis). One could imagine that by loving this world and disregarding the hereafter [76:27], these people have rendered God helpless, and have defeated His purpose that they should believe and obey. The verse responds to this impression by saying that these people are all God's creatures. He has created them and tautened their joints. And He may take them away and bring others instead of them whenever He wills. So how could they outstrip Him when all their creation, affairs, life and death are in His hands?

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إِنَّ هذِهِ تَذْكِرَةٌ فَمَنْ شاءَ اتَّخَذَ إِلى رَبِّهِ سَبِيلاً ﴿٢٩﴾

(76:29) ***This is indeed a reminder. So let anyone who wills take the way toward his Lord.***

The demonstrative pronoun "This" refers to the content of the chapter. We interpreted this verse in Sūrah al-Muzzammil above (73:19).

وَ ما تَشاؤُنَ إِلاَّ أَنْ يَشاءَ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كانَ عَلِيماً حَكِيماً ﴿٣٠﴾

(76:30) ***But you do not will unless it is willed by Allah. Indeed Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise.***

The exception in this verse pertains to *anyone who wills* (76:29). This is a subtle point: it means that the people's *will*—not their *action*—depends on God's will. God's will does not directly affect the people's actions, but it first affects their will. Hence, His will does not override or cancel the volition of a servant, and does not result in *jabr* (compulsion, determinism, predestination). This also means that the people are not independent actors and decision makers, to do whatever they wish whether God wills it or not. Their acts are voluntary since they can be legitimately attributed

to their volition. However, their volition itself is not voluntary, meaning that they cannot choose to have free will or not. We have repeatedly discussed this in many places.[1]

This verse serves to clarify the audience's impression that they are independent in their will, regardless of their Lord's will. Perhaps this is why there is a shift of address from the third person to the second person in this verse: *But you do not will unless it is willed by Allah*. There is also a shift of person in how the verse refers to God, from the first person plural in the last verse to the third person singular: *it is willed by Allah. Indeed Allah is*. This transition substantiates the message of the verse, because God is referred to as *Allah*, Who is the origin and end of all things. Given His position—as *Allah*—there can be no will or impact in the world unless He wills it.

… Indeed Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise: This is prelude to what is stated in the next verse.

يُدْخِلُ مَنْ يَشاءُ فِي رَحْمَتِهِ وَ الظَّالِمِينَ أَعَدَّ لَهُمْ عَذاباً أَلِيماً ﴿٣١﴾

(76:31) ***He admits whomever He wills into His mercy, and as for the wrongdoers, He has prepared for them a painful punishment.***

The object of *He wills* is omitted, but it can be inferred from the verse. The implied meaning is: "He admits into His mercy whomever He wills to be admitted into His mercy." Of course, He wills this only for the believers and the Godwary. The case of others—which are the sinners and the disbelievers—is clarified by the second half of the verse: *and as for the wrongdoers, He has prepared for them a painful punishment*. This verse describes God's ongoing and consistent[2] custom in how He deals with His servants in terms of their eternal felicity and wretchedness. The last part of the previous verse justifies this custom of God: *Indeed Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise*. This means that God's custom is not arbitrary or based on ignorance. Rather, He treats every group of people as they deserve, and

1 See verses 74:56 and 76:3 above. Also see vol. 1, pp. 143 and 162ff of the English translation, under verses 2:21-25 and 2:26-27; vol. 2, pp. 209ff and 271-272, under verses 2:153-157 and 2:164; vol. 13, pp. 25ff and 81ff, under verses 6:9 and 6:35; vol. 15, p. 65, under verses 7:10-25. (Trans.)

2 This is inferred from the use of the present tense in the verse, which indicates something ongoing. (Trans.)

He will soon inform all of them about the reality of their deeds.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning *and do not obey any sinner or disbeliever among them* (76:24) Qatādah said: We have been told that this was revealed with reference to God's enemy Abū Jahl.[1]

Author's comment: This is apparently an application (*taṭbīq*) of the verse [not its original cause of revelation, and not its exclusive meaning].

(2) Concerning *and glorify Him the night long* (76:26) Aḥmad b. Muḥammad inquired from Imam al-Riḍā: "What is meant by glorification here?" The Imam said, "The Night Prayer (*ṣalāt al-layl*)."[2]

(3) Part of Imam al-Mahdī's speech with Kāmil b. Ibrāhīm al-Madanī was: And you have also come to inquire about the view of *mufawwiḍah*.[3] They have lied. Rather, our hearts are receptacles for the will of the Almighty God. Whenever He wills [and whatever He wills], we shall will as well. He says: *But you do not will unless it is willed by Allah* (76:30).[4]

(4) The Messenger of God frequently said in his sermons: Anything that is coming is near; that which shall [inevitably] come is not far. God does not hasten because of anyone's haste. What God wills [shall occur], not what the people will. There is that which people will, and there is that which God wills: that which God wills shall occur, even if the people dislike it. Nothing can postpone what God has advanced, and nothing can advance what God has postponed. Nothing happens except with God's leave.[5]

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

3 What is meant here by *tafwīḍ* (delegation, entrustment, empowerment) is not the opposite of *jabr* (compulsion, determinism, predestination). Rather, it refers to the belief that God's power and the affairs of His creation have been delegated and entrusted to the Infallibles. (Trans.)

4 *Al-Kharāʾij wa al-jarāʾiḥ*.

5 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Ibn Shihāb, on the authority of Sālim, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.

Author's comment: There are also some narrations from the Ahl al-Bayt which match their *wilāyah* (divine guardianship, spiritual authority) with the word *ḥukm* (command, rule, judgment) in the verses, *So submit patiently to your Lord's command* (76:24), and the word *mercy* in the verse, *He admits whomever He wills into His mercy* (76:31). These should be understood as either extending the verses to another context (called *jary*), or offering a hidden layer of meaning. They are not an interpretation for the apparent and primary meaning of the verses (called *tafsīr*).

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Chapter 77

al-Mursalāt (The Emissaries)

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Verses 1-15

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَ الْمُرْسَلاتِ عُرْفاً ﴿١﴾ فَالْعاصِفاتِ عَصْفاً ﴿٢﴾ وَ النَّاشِراتِ نَشْراً ﴿٣﴾ فَالْفارِقاتِ فَرْقاً ﴿٤﴾ فَالْمُلْقِياتِ ذِكْراً ﴿٥﴾ عُذْراً أَوْ نُذْراً ﴿٦﴾ إِنَّما تُوعَدُونَ لَواقِعٌ ﴿٧﴾ فَإِذَا النُّجُومُ طُمِسَتْ ﴿٨﴾ وَ إِذَا السَّماءُ فُرِجَتْ ﴿٩﴾ وَ إِذَا الْجِبالُ نُسِفَتْ ﴿١٠﴾ وَ إِذَا الرُّسُلُ أُقِّتَتْ ﴿١١﴾ لِأَيِّ يَوْمٍ أُجِّلَتْ ﴿١٢﴾ لِيَوْمِ الْفَصْلِ ﴿١٣﴾ وَ ما أَدْراكَ ما يَوْمُ الْفَصْلِ ﴿١٤﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

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In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

(77:1) *By those released successively!*
(77:2) *By the tempestuous tempests!*
(77:3) *By the spreaders spreading!*
(77:4) *By the separators separating!*
(77:5) *By the inspirers of remembrance,*
(77:6) *to excuse or to warn!*
(77:7) *Indeed what you are promised will surely befall.*
(77:8) *So when the stars are blotted out,*
(77:9) *and when the sky is split,*
(77:10) *and when the mountains are scattered [like dust],*
(77:11) *and when the time is set for the messengers [to witness]*
(77:12) *—for what day has [all] that been set [to occur]?*
(77:13) *For the Day of Judgment!*
(77:14) *And what will show you what is the Day of Judgment!?*
(77:15) *Woe to the deniers on that day!*

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Introduction & Commentary

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 50 verses. The sūrah talks about the Day of Separation, which is the Day of Resurrection. It emphasizes its occurrence, warns those who deny it, and gives good news to others. The aspect of warning is more pronounced in this chapter than the good promise, as it repeats ten times: *Woe to the deniers on that day!* The theme of the chapter clearly shows that it was revealed in Mecca.

وَ الْمُرْسَلاتِ عُرْفاً ﴿١﴾

(77:1) ***By those released successively,***

In the first six verses of the sūrah, God swears by *those released successively*, *the tempestuous tempests*, *the spreaders spreading*, *the separators separating*, and *the inspirers of remembrance, to excuse or to warn* (77:1-6). Taken on their own and irrespective of the context, the first two expressions—that is, *those released successively* (77:1) and *the tempestuous tempests* (77:2)—apparently indicate consecutive cyclones and severe storms. However, the last vow—*the inspirers of remembrance, to excuse or to warn* (77:6)—is almost an explicit description of the angels who convey the divine revelation to the messengers so that the people may be warned, and God's proof against them may be complete. The other verses can also be plausibly interpreted in this light, without any contrivance.

There are two other suggested interpretations which are not plausible:

(1) All five vows in these verses describe the winds.

Comment: As we said, the first two expressions—*those released* (77:1) and *the tempests* (77:2)—apparently refer to the winds, but this cannot be easily and justifiably held with respect to the last three vows. In particular, the very last vow would entail much contrivance.

(2) The first two vows describe the winds, while the next three describe the angels of revelation.

Comment: This is not plausible because there is no clear connection between the winds and the angels of revelation so that they may be presented in a single sequence of vows, serving a common theme.

The different justifications offered by the exegetes are far-fetched ideas that do not spring to the mind from the text, unless there is some previous indication of them. It is best to disregard their views, which are truly numerous, and can hardly be enumerated. We should interpret the verses as pertaining to the angels of revelation, which is what we also see

in similar verses at the beginning of Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt: *By those ranged in ranks! By the ones who drive vigorously! By those who recite the reminder* (37:1-3).[1] The same theme is reflected in these verses: *Knower of the Unseen, He does not authorize anyone over His Unseen, except one with whom He is pleased—a messenger. Then He dispatches a sentinel before him and behind him so that He may ascertain that they have communicated the messages of their Lord* (72:26-28).

By those released* (mursalāt, from irsāl) *successively* (ʿurfan)*: Here God is taking a vow. *ʿUrf* means "the mane of a horse," which is used as a simile to describe something successive and sequential. For instance, it is said, "They came like a horse's mane (*ka-ʿurf al-faras*)." It is also used metaphorically, as it is said, "The mane of sand grouses came," meaning that they came consecutively; or "They came to him in a single mane (*ʿurfan wāḥidan*)," meaning that they came one after another. Another meaning of *ʿurf* is *maʿrūf* (that which is known)—with respect to commands and prohibitions.[2] Based on the first meaning, *ʿurf* would be a *ḥāl* (circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase).[3] Based on the second meaning, it would be an intended object (*mafʿūl lahu*).[4]

Irsāl (releasing, dispatching, loosening) is the antonym of *imsāk* (withholding, grasping, restraining). *Mursalāt* is a feminine plural, used for the angels in the sense that they are *jamāʿāt* (groups, congregations, clusters) [which is a feminine plural], or with reference to the Spirit (*rūḥ*) which descends with the angels, as the Qur'an says: *He sends down the angels with the Spirit of His command to whomever of His servants He wills* (16:2); *He*

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1 Chapters 51 (al-Dhāriyāt) and 79 (al-Nāziʿāt) also have the same style, and have some indications showing that these expressions are made with reference to the angels. Meanwhile, winds, clouds, ships and the like can also be matched and identified with the angels, and reduced to them, since the angels are intermediate forces that direct natural phenomena. Therefore, other interpretations of these vows remain open and reconcilable. (Trans.)

2 It means what is known to be the good and appropriate course of conduct. (Trans.)

3 The meaning would be: "By those that are released *while* they are in a succession." (Trans.)

4 The meaning would be: "By those that are released *for* a good cause" or "*for* enjoining good." (Trans.)

casts the Spirit of His command upon whomever of His servants He wills (40:15). The meaning is: "I swear by the groups of the angels of revelation that are dispatched successively."

Some exegetes have suggested that the verse refers to the winds that are released in succession. We already explained the implausibility of this interpretation. Others have said that it refers to the prophets [who are sent to the people in sequence]. However, the verses that follow do not support this view.

فَالْعاصِفاتِ عَصْفاً ﴿٢﴾

(77:2) *By the tempestuous tempests* (fal-ʿāṣifāt ʿaṣfan)*!*

The letter *fā*ʾ (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of the verse shows that the verse is an apposition to *those released* in the last verse. *ʿAṣf* means "rapid flow." The hard blow of the winds is used as a metaphor for the rapid movement of the angels in conducting their missions. The meaning is: "I swear by the angels who are released successively, and thus they move rapidly like tempestuous winds."

وَ النَّاشِراتِ نَشْراً ﴿٣﴾

(77:3) *By the spreaders spreading* (nashran)*!*

This is another oath. *Nashr*—which collocates with letter, book, dress and so on—means "opening, spreading, unrolling." What is meant here is unrolling the scrolls of revelation. This is reflected in the verses: *Nay! These are indeed a reminder—so let anyone who wills remember—in honored scriptures, exalted and purified, in the hands of envoys, noble and pious* (80:11-16). The meaning is: "I swear by the angels who unroll the scrolls which bear the revelation so that the prophet may receive it."

Other suggested meanings by the exegetes are:

(1) The winds which God spreads out as harbingers of His mercy.[1]
(2) The winds which spread out the clouds.
(3) The angels which unroll the records of deeds.
(4) The angels which spread their wings as they descend.

And there is more to the list.

فَالْفارِقاتِ فَرْقاً ﴿٤﴾

1 This is deduced from verses 7:57, 25:48, 27:63. (Trans.)

(77:4) ***By the separators separating*** **(fal-fāriqāt farqan)*!***

Farq (separation, distinction, differentiation) here means distinguishing between truth and falsehood, lawful and unlawful. The letter *fāʾ* (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of the verse indicates that this quality is a consequence of the abovementioned spreading [77:3].

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فَالْمُلْقِيَاتِ ذِكْرًا ﴿٥﴾

(77:5) ***By the inspirers of remembrance!***

There are two possible interpretations for *remembrance* here: (1) The Qur'an in particular, which the angels recited to the Prophet. (2) God's revelation in general, which was conveyed to the prophets. The three qualities mentioned in these verses—the spreading (77:3), the separation (77:4), and the inspiration of the remembrance (77:5)—are consecutive stages that build on one another. First there is the spreading of the scrolls, which initiates the separation and distinction between truth and falsehood. Then that comes to full realization by the inspiration and recitation of the remembrance. In other words, a certain stage of the separation is realized as a consequence of the spreading; then it is fully realized when the message is communicated.

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عُذْرًا أَوْ نُذْرًا ﴿٦﴾

(77:6) ***to excuse*** **(ʿudhran)** ***or to warn*** **(nudhr)*!***

This verse presents the intended object (*mafʿūl lahu*) of the last verse. The conjunction "or" serves to diversify.[1] As some exegetes have explained, the above process constitutes a justification for God against His servants [on the Day of Judgment], showing that His punishment is completely based on wisdom. This effectively reduces to completing the proof and evidence against someone. The meaning is: "The angels inspire the remembrance so that it may complete God's argument against the deniers, and may warn others." This is a plausible meaning.

Others have said that *ʿudhr* is synonymous with *iʿdhār* (excusing, exonerating). It means producing something that would cause one to be excused (*maʿdhūr*). Likewise, *nudhr* means *indhār* (warning, admonishing). Both terms are intended as a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund).

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1 That is, these are two possible objectives for the communication of the remembrance. (Trans.)

The meaning is: "The angels inspire the remembrance so that it may be a means of excuse and exoneration for God's servants who believe in it, and a means of warning for others."

إِنَّما تُوعَدُونَ لَواقِعٌ ﴿٧﴾

(77:7) ***Indeed what you are promised will surely befall*** **(la-wāqiʿ).**

This verse is the complement to the series of vows in the previous verses, and is addressed to all humankind. The particle *mā* means "what" (called *mawṣūlah*, indicating the object of promise). *What you are promised* is the Day of Resurrection, with all its punishments and rewards. The word *wāqiʿ* (befalling) is more expressive than *kāʾin* (being) since it connotes a firm establishment and settlement [of the event]. The meaning is: "What God has promised you—about the resurrection, punishments and rewards—shall certainly occur, without any doubt."

Discussion on God's Vows in the Qur'an

A subtle technique of rhetoric in the opening six verses of this chapter is that the vows not only emphasize the message that follows, but also substantiate it. The message and conclusion of the verses is that there shall certainly be some retribution. The first six verses describe God's management and direction of affairs as the Lord of the people. He dispatches successive emissaries to spread out the scrolls, to differentiate between truth and falsehood, and to inspire the remembrance to the Prophet. These are part of God's plan, but they are incomplete unless there is some religious obligation. And that in turn requires a definite tryst that is appointed for the payment and retribution of those who succeed or fail in their duties.

In order to emphasize the promised retribution, God swears by His plan [for humankind], which is itself a proof for the occurrence of His promise. Hence, it is as though He is saying, "I swear by this argument that its conclusion is true." The readers are encouraged to reflect and contemplate on all Qur'anic vows. Then they will realize that what God swears by in each case is in fact an argument which substantiates His message. Here are some examples:

(1) Concerning sustenance He says: *By the Lord of the sky and the earth, it is indeed the truth* (51:23). The source of people's sustenance is God's very position as *the Lord of the sky and the earth*.

(2) *By your life, they were bewildered in their drunkenness* (15:72). The

life of the Prophet—who is pure and infallible through God's protection—indicates their drunkenness and blindness [by way of contrast].

(3) *By the sun and her forenoon splendour… By the soul and Him who fashioned it, and inspired it with [discernment between] its virtues and vices: one who purifies it is felicitous, and one who betrays it fails* (91:1-10). The solid order of God's creation of the universe—all the way down to the human soul, which is inspired with its vice and virtue—is evidence that one who purifies their soul will succeed, and one who disregards it will fail.

The same analysis can be made concerning the other Qur'anic vows. Some of them may be more occult and thus require deeper contemplation and investigation, such as: *By the fig and the olive, by Mount Sinai!* (95:1-2).

The reader is encouraged to reflect on this.

فَإِذَا النُّجُومُ طُمِسَتْ ﴿٨﴾

(77:8) *So when the stars are blotted out,*

This verse and the next three verses [up to verse 77:11] describe the promised day in the verse: *Indeed what you are promised will surely befall* (77:7). The word *idhā* (when) is a conditional particle, where its concluding clause (called the apodosis) is omitted since it is understood from the verse that follows: *for what day has [all] that been set [to occur]?… the deniers on that day* (77:12-15).

In these verses, God defines the promised day by mentioning the events which will coincide with the extinction of human life and the disintegration of the universe. The stars will blot out, the heaven will be rent asunder, the mountains will collapse, and the world's order will transform to a completely different order. Such descriptions are repeated in many chapters of the Qur'an, particularly the smaller ones, such as Chapters 78 (al-Nabaʾ), 79 (al-Nāziʿāt), 81 (al-Takwīr), 82 (al-Infiṭār), 84 (al-Inshiqāq), 89 (al-Fajr), 99 (al-Zilzāl) and 101 (al-Qāriʿah). The events mentioned in these chapters are called "the tokens of the Hour" (*ashrāṭ al-sāʿah*) in the narrations.[1]

We know beyond doubt from the Qur'an and hadith that life in the

1 The term is deduced from verse 47:18. (Trans.)

hereafter is categorically different from the life in this world. The hereafter is a realm of eternity. Some will abide in sheer happiness, and will indulge in whatever they wish. Others will be strictly wretched, and will taste nothing but pain. However, currently we are living an impermanent life in a transient realm that is governed by apparent means and external forces. In this abode, life is mixed with death, gaining is tied to losing, happiness is fraught with misery, comfort is blended with fatigue, and joy is coupled with sorrow. The hereafter is a realm of compensation but no action, while this world is a realm of action but no compensation. In short, the two worlds are diametrically different.

And this is how God defines the hereafter: by stating the events which will mark the termination of this world, such as the destruction of the foundation of the earth, the scattering of the mountains, the splitting of the sky, and the darkening of the stars. God defines the new world by describing how the previous order and design will no longer be in place. The Qur'an says: *Certainly you have known the first creation, so why do you not take admonition?* (56:62).

So when the stars are blotted out **(ṭumisat, from ṭams)*:*** The stars will lose their light and other properties. *Ṭams* means "blotting out the effects of something." God says: *When the stars scatter* (81:2).

وَ إِذَا السَّماءُ فُرِجَتْ ﴿٩﴾

(77:9) ***and when the sky is split*** **(furijat, from farj),**

The sky will cleave asunder. *Farj* and *furjah* means "a split between two things." God says: *When the sky is split open* (84:1).

وَ إِذَا الْجِبالُ نُسِفَتْ ﴿١٠﴾

(77:10) ***and when the mountains are scattered*** **[like dust] (nusifat),**

The mountains will be uprooted and demolished. When the wind uproots and removes something, it is said: *nasafat al-rīḥ*. God says: *They question you concerning the mountains. Say, "My Lord will scatter them [like dust]"* (20:105).

وَ إِذَا الرُّسُلُ أُقِّتَتْ ﴿١١﴾

(77:11) ***and when the time is set for the messengers [to witness]*** **(uqqitat)**

There are two possible meanings for this verse: (1) "The messengers will be given an appointment to be present for testifying against their nations." (2) "The time for which the messengers were waiting to testify against their nations will arrive." The verb *uqqitat* is derived from the infinitive *taʾqīt*, which is the same as *tawqīt* (specifying a time, setting an appointment). God says: *Then We will surely question those to whom the messengers were sent, and We will surely question the messengers* (7:6); *The day Allah will gather the messengers and say, "What was the response to you?"* (5:109).

لِأَيِّ يَوْمٍ أُجِّلَتْ ﴿١٢﴾

(77:12) —*for what day has [all] that been set [to occur]* (ujjilat, from taʾjīl)*?*

Taʾjīl means "setting a specific time (*ajal*) for something." It is commonly used to imply *taʾkhīr* (delay, deferral, postponement), which is one of its implications. For instance, a loan that is due for later is called *al-dayn al-muʾajjal*, as opposed to one that is due now (called *al-dayn al-ḥāl*). This meaning [of deferral] is more congruent with the verse. The antecedent of the pronoun "that" is the abovementioned events: the stars being blotted out [77:8], the sky splitting [77:9], the mountains being destroyed [77:10], and the appointed time for the messengers arriving [77:11]. The meaning is: "For which day have these events been delayed?"

Based on the first meaning of *taʾjīl*—that is, "setting a specific time for something"—some have suggested that the antecedent of the pronoun "that" is either the messengers,[1] or the news that they brought with respect to the hereafter, its tremendous occurrence, the punishment of the disbelievers, and the bliss of the believers.[2] However, none of these meanings is apparent.

This verse and the next one are expressed in the form of question and answer: *for what day has [all] that been set [to occur]? For the Day of Judgment* (77:12-13). This way of expression emphasizes the significance, threat and shock of the subject matter. The type of question found in this verse implies an omitted verb "say." What is meant is that the intensity,

1 The meaning would be: "For which day have the messengers been given a time to testify against their nations?" (Trans.)

2 The meaning would be: "What days has been assigned for the occurrence of these events and promises?" (Trans.)

gravity and shock of that day is such that one would naturally *say*, "For what day have these tremendous, grievous, and shocking events been delayed?" Then the answer is: *For the Day of Judgment* (77:13). In short, the meaning is: "The abovementioned events have been delayed for the Day of Judgment."

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لِيَوْمِ الْفَصْلِ ﴿١٣﴾

(77:13) ***For the Day of Judgment!***

That is the day of retribution, where disputes will be settled through divine arbitration. God says: *Allah will indeed judge between them on the Day of Resurrection* (22:17).

وَ ما أَدْراكَ ما يَوْمُ الْفَصْلِ ﴿١٤﴾

(77:14) ***And what will show you what is the Day of Judgment!?***

This verse glorifies and highlights the significance of that day.

وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

(77:15) Woe **(wayl)** ***to the deniers on that day!***

Wayl is synonymous with *halāk* (death, destruction). This verse is a curse on the deniers. What is meant by *the deniers* are those who denied the Day of Judgment, which they were promised. That is based on the theme of the verses. The vows at the beginning of the chapter were meant to emphasize that those promises *will surely befall* (77:7).

The chapter does not explicitly mention the complement of the conditional particle *idhā* (when) in the above verses: *So when the stars are blotted out…* (77:8-11). The implied meaning is: "When these events occur, then the punishment that is promised for denial will befall the deniers." Another possibility is: "When these events occur, then it shall be the Day of Judgment, when those who denied it will perish."

Examining Narrations

(1) Once Abū Bakr told the Prophet, "You have aged [so quickly] O Messenger of God!" The Prophet replied, "Chapters 11 (Hūd), 56 (al-Wāqiʿah), 77 (al-Mursalāt) and 78 (*ʿamma yatasāʾalūna*) have made me age."[1]

1 *Al-Khiṣāl*, on the authority of ʿIkrimah, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās.

(2) Ibn Masʿūd said: Sūrah al-Mursalāt was revealed to the Prophet when we were with him in a cave in Miná. I learnt it [directly] from his mouth as he recited it. His mouth was still fresh with the chapter when a snake attacked him. He said, "Kill it!"

(3) We chased it, but it escaped. Then the Prophet said, "It was spared from your harm, as you were spared from its harm."[1]

(4) Concerning *By those released successively* (ʿurfan) (77:1) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It [*ʿurfan*] means verses that follow one another.

(5) Concerning the same verse, it is narrated from Imam ʿAlī and Ibn Masʿūd: It means the angels that are sent with *maʿrūf* (good), meaning the commands and prohibitions of God.[2]

(6) Concerning *So when the stars are blotted out* (ṭumisat) (77:8) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It means that their light will disappear and fade away.

(7) Concerning *So when the stars are blotted out* (ṭumisat, from ṭams) (77:8) Imam al-Bāqir said, "Their *ṭams* means the disappearance of their light." Concerning *and when the sky is split* (77:9) he said, "They will crack and cleave." Concerning *and when the time is set for the messengers* (77:11) he said, "They are raised in different times."[3]

(8) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: *Uqqitat* (77:11) means that they [the messengers] are raised[4] in different times.[5]

(9) Concerning *for what day has [all] that been* ujjilat (77:12) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *Ujjilat* means *ukhkhirat* (deferred, postponed, delayed).

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Nasāʾī and Ibn Mardawayh. This is also reported through two other chains of narration.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*: (1) on the authority of al-Harawī, from Ibn Masʿūd; (2) on the authority of Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī, on the authority of Imam ʿAlī's companions, from the Imam.

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

4 Apparently what is meant in this hadith and the last one is that the messengers *will be* raised in different occasions on the Day of Resurrection. Another possibility is that the verse refers to the different times in which they *were* raised and appointed as messengers in this world. (Trans.)

5 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

Verses 16-50

أَ لَمْ نُهْلِكِ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٦﴾ ثُمَّ نُتْبِعُهُمُ الْآخِرِينَ ﴿١٧﴾ كَذلِكَ نَفْعَلُ بِالْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿١٨﴾ وَيْلٌ
يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿١٩﴾ أَ لَمْ نَخْلُقْكُمْ مِنْ ماءٍ مَهِينٍ ﴿٢٠﴾ فَجَعَلْناهُ فِي قَرارٍ مَكِينٍ
﴿٢١﴾ إِلى قَدَرٍ مَعْلُومٍ ﴿٢٢﴾ فَقَدَرْنا فَنِعْمَ الْقادِرُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾ أَ
لَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ كِفاتاً ﴿٢٥﴾ أَحْياءً وَ أَمْواتاً ﴿٢٦﴾ وَ جَعَلْنا فِيها رَواسِيَ شامِخاتٍ وَ
أَسْقَيْناكُمْ ماءً فُراتاً ﴿٢٧﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٢٨﴾ انْطَلِقُوا إِلى ما كُنْتُمْ بِهِ
تُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾ انْطَلِقُوا إِلى ظِلٍّ ذِي ثَلاثِ شُعَبٍ ﴿٣٠﴾ لا ظَلِيلٍ وَ لا يُغْنِي مِنَ
اللَّهَبِ ﴿٣١﴾ إِنَّها تَرْمِي بِشَرَرٍ كَالْقَصْرِ ﴿٣٢﴾ كَأَنَّهُ جِمالَتٌ صُفْرٌ ﴿٣٣﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ
لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾ هذا يَوْمُ لا يَنْطِقُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾ وَ لا يُؤْذَنُ لَهُمْ فَيَعْتَذِرُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ
لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾ هذا يَوْمُ الْفَصْلِ جَمَعْناكُمْ وَ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾ فَإِنْ كانَ لَكُمْ كَيْدٌ
فَكِيدُونِ ﴿٣٩﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾ إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي ظِلالٍ وَ عُيُونٍ ﴿٤١﴾ وَ
فَواكِهَ مِمَّا يَشْتَهُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾ كُلُوا وَ اشْرَبُوا هَنِيئاً بِما كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾ إِنَّا كَذلِكَ
نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾ كُلُوا وَ تَمَتَّعُوا قَلِيلاً إِنَّكُمْ
مُجْرِمُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾ وَ إِذا قِيلَ لَهُمُ ارْكَعُوا لا يَرْكَعُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾
وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾ فَبِأَيِّ حَدِيثٍ بَعْدَهُ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

(77:16) *Did We not destroy the ancients?*
(77:17) *Then made the latter ones follow them.*
(77:18) *That is how We deal with the guilty.*
(77:19) *Woe to the deniers on that day!*
(77:20) *Have We not created you from a base fluid,*
(77:21) *[and] then lodged it in a secure abode*
(77:22) *until a known term?*
(77:23) *Then We designed; so how excellent designers We are!*

(77:24) *Woe to the deniers on that day!*
(77:25) *Have We not made the earth a receptacle,*
(77:26) *both for the living and the dead,*
(77:27) *and set in it lofty [and] firm mountains, and given you agreeable water to drink?*
(77:28) *Woe to the deniers on that day!*
(77:29) *[They will be told]: "Get off toward what you used to deny!*
(77:30) *Get off toward the triple-forked shadow."*
(77:31) *Neither shading nor is of any avail against the flame.*
(77:32) *Indeed it throws up sparks [huge] like palaces,*
(77:33) *[bright] as if they were yellow camels.*
(77:34) *Woe to the deniers on that day!*
(77:35) *This is a day wherein they will not speak,*
(77:36) *nor will they be permitted to offer excuses.*
(77:37) *Woe to the deniers on that day!*
(77:38) *"This is the Day of Judgement. We have brought together you and the ancients.*
(77:39) *If you have any stratagems [left], try out your stratagems against Me!"*
(77:40) *Woe to the deniers on that day!*
(77:41) *Indeed the Godwary will be amid shades and springs,*
(77:42) *and fruits, such as they desire.*
(77:43) *[They will be told:] "Eat and drink to your heart's content, [as a reward] for what you used to do."*
(77:44) *Thus indeed do We reward the good-doers.*
(77:45) *Woe to the deniers on that day!*
(77:46) *"Eat and enjoy a little! You are indeed guilty."*
(77:47) *Woe to the deniers on that day!*
(77:48) *And when they are told, "Bow down," they do not bow down!*
(77:49) *Woe to the deniers on that day!*
(77:50) *So what discourse will they believe after this?*

Introduction & Commentary

These verses provide arguments for the oneness of God's Lordship, which necessitates a Day of Judgment for a final settlement of disputes. That is when those who denied it will be punished. The verses describe the retribution that is prepared for the deniers, and the rewards that will

be given to the Godwary. The chapter ends by rebuking the disbelievers for arrogantly turning away from serving God and believing in His words.

أَلَمْ نُهْلِكِ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٦﴾ ثُمَّ نُتْبِعُهُمُ الْآخِرِينَ ﴿١٧﴾ كَذَٰلِكَ نَفْعَلُ بِالْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿١٨﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿١٩﴾

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(77:16-19) ***Did We not destroy*** **(nuhlik)** ***the ancients? Then made the latter ones follow them*** **(nutbiʿuhum, from itbāʾ).** ***That is how We deal with the guilty. Woe to the deniers on that day!***

The question in the first verse is a rhetorical one, implying a negation. *The ancients* refer to nations and communities who lived in the distant past, such as the tribes of Noah, ʿĀd and Thamūd. *The latter ones* refer to any nation that came after them. *Itbāʿ* means "placing something after another." The second verse marks an independent statement from the first one.[1] The meaning is: "We certainly destroyed the deniers amongst the ancient nations. Then We also destroy the subsequent nations that follow them."

That is how We deal with the guilty: This verse serves as a justification and explanation for the last two verses. That is why it does not start with the conjunction "and," but is stated as an independent sentence. It is as though one asked, "Why were they destroyed?" and the Qur'an replies: *That is how We deal with the guilty*.

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There are three main aspects to the above verses [77:16-18]:

(1) As one can see, these verses have the same theme and tone of warning that is found in the central message of the chapter, which is the repeated verse: *Woe to the deniers on that day* (77:19).

(2) At the same time, the verses serve as a proof for God's unity in Lordship. The verses' argument can be elaborated as follows:

> Premise A: Destroying the guilty people is a form of management and direction of affairs in the human world.
>
> Premise B: The polytheists would acknowledge that the destroyer

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1 If the verse were extending and adding to the rhetorical question in the first verse, then its verb (*nutbiʿuhum*) should have been *majzūm* (apocopated), just like the verb *nuhlik* (destroy) in the first verse. (Auth.)

In other words, the verses are not only describing a past event, but they outline God's ongoing custom with all nations throughout the times. (Trans.)

is no one but God.

Conclusion: God is the Lord of humankind, and there is no lord but Him. He is the One to be worshiped, and no one else.

(3) The verses prove the Day of Judgment. This is because destroying a nation for their sin is only justified and sensible if they disobey a set of obligations that was previously given to them. Further, obligation would be redundant unless there is some reward for those who obey, and some punishment for those who disobey. Thus there must be a Day of Judgment to differentiate between the people—the obedient and the disobedient. Such reward and punishment cannot take place in this world, because this realm lacks the capacity to encompass all rewards and punishments. Therefore, there must be a day when everyone will be paid according to their deeds. That *is the Day of Judgment* (37:21); *That is a day on which all humankind will be gathered* (11:103).

أَلَمْ نَخْلُقْكُمْ مِنْ ماءٍ مَهِينٍ ﴿٢٠﴾ فَجَعَلْناهُ فِي قَرارٍ مَكِينٍ ﴿٢١﴾ إِلى قَدَرٍ مَعْلُومٍ ﴿٢٢﴾
فَقَدَرْنا فَنِعْمَ الْقادِرُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

(77:20-24) ***Have We not created you from a base fluid*** **(mā' mahīn),** **[and]** ***then lodged it in a secure abode until a known term? Then We designed; so how excellent designers We are! Woe to the deniers on that day!***

Here again we have a rhetorical question which implies a negation [as in verse 77:16]. *Mā' mahīn* (lit. despicable water) means an insignificant and worthless amount of water that does not satisfy any need. What is meant here is *nuṭfah* (semen, sperm). The *secure abode* is the womb. The *known term* is the period of pregnancy.

Then We designed (fa-qadarna, from qadr); so how excellent designers We are: What is meant by *qadr* here is the transitive sense of *taqdīr* (measurement, ordainment, allotment). The letter *fā'* (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of verse 77:23 indicates that the stage of measurement is subsequent and consequent to the creation [77:20]. The meaning is: "We first created you, then We ordained all the events that should occur to you, as well as all your properties and future states, such as the length or brevity of your life, your physical stature and beauty, your health and illness, and your sustenance in life." Another suggested possibility is that the verb *qadarnā* is derived from *qudrah* (strength, ability, power), which

is the antonym of *ḍaʿf* (weakness, inability). Then the meaning would be: "Thus We are capable of all these tasks." However, the first meaning is more plausible.

The meaning of the above verses [77:20-23] is: "Surely We created you of a worthless fluid, which is the semen. Then We placed that fluid in a secure abode, which is the womb. We preserved it there until a specified time, which is the period of pregnancy. Then We planned and ordained everything that pertains to your existence, including all events, traits, and states. This shows how excellent of planners We are!"

Much like the previous set of verses [77:16-18], these verses also prove God's unity of Lordship, as well as the inevitability of the Day of Judgment. God's Lordship of the people necessitates their humility and obedience toward Him. That is an obligation that any servant owes their Master. And any obligation necessitates some retribution for its observation or violation. Thus there must be a day when the people are paid for their deeds, and that is the Day of Judgment.

أَ لَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ كِفاتاً ﴿٢٥﴾ أَحْياءً وَ أَمْواتاً ﴿٢٦﴾ وَ جَعَلْنا فِيها رَواسِيَ شامِخاتٍ وَ أَسْقَيْناكُمْ ماءً فُراتاً ﴿٢٧﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٢٨﴾

(77:25-28) ***Have We not made the earth a receptacle* (kifātan)*, both for the living and the dead, and set in it lofty [and] firm mountains, and given you agreeable water to drink? Woe to the deniers on that day!***

Kifāt and *kaft* mean "gathering, joining, combining." The meaning of the first two verses is: "Have We not made the earth a gathering that accommodates all people—both the living and the dead?" It is also said that *kifāt* is the plural of *kaft*, which means "container, receptacle." The meaning would be: "Have We not made the earth into receptacles that accommodate both the living and the dead?"

and set in it lofty (shāmikhāt) [and] firm mountains (rawāsī), and given you agreeable (furātan) water to drink?: *Rawāsī* means "firm mountains." *Shāmikhāt* means "high, elevated." Referring to the mountains is a prelude to the next part of the verse—*and given you agreeable water to drink*—because the streams and natural fountains spring from the mountains, and then flow down to the plains. *Furāt* means "sweet and potable water." We can deduce the same kind of proof and argument from these verses [77:25-27] as we did from the previous verses [concerning God's

unity of Lordship, and the Day of Judgment].

انْطَلِقُوا إِلى ما كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(77:29) [They will be told]*: "Get off* (inṭaliqū, from inṭilāq) *toward what you used to deny!*

This verse narrates what the guilty will be told on the Day of Judgment. The speaker is God, as we can infer from a verse below: *If you have any stratagems [left], try out your stratagems against Me!* (77:39). *What you used to deny* is hell. *Inṭilāq* means "moving directly and immediately from one place to another." The meaning is: "They will be told, 'Move right away from the plain of resurrection to the fire that you used to deny."

انْطَلِقُوا إِلى ظِلٍّ ذِى ثَلاثِ شُعَبٍ ﴿٣٠﴾

(77:30) *Get off toward the triple-forked shadow."*

According to the exegetes, *shadow* in this verse means the plume of the smoke that will fume from hellfire. The Qur'an says: *And the shadow of a dense black smoke* (56:43). Exegetes have also suggested that the smoke is described as *triple-forked* in reference to its breadth and immensity, because a massive smoke would naturally divide into several branches.

لا ظَلِيلٍ وَ لا يُغْنِي مِنَ اللَّهَبِ ﴿٣١﴾

(77:31) *Neither shading* (ẓalīl) *nor is of any avail against the flame* (al-lahab).

The adjective *ẓalīl* is used for a shadow or canopy that protects one from heat and harm. What overshadows them in hell will not provide such protection. *Lahab* means the upper parts of a flame, which would be red, yellow or green.

إِنَّها تَرْمِي بِشَرَرٍ كَالْقَصْرِ ﴿٣٢﴾ كَأَنَّهُ جِمالَتٌ صُفْرٌ ﴿٣٣﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

(77:32-34) *Indeed it throws up sparks* (bi-sharar) *[huge] like palaces* (qaṣr), *[bright] as if they were yellow camels* (jimālah). *Woe to the deniers on that day!*

The antecedent of the pronoun "it" is the fire, which is understood from the context. *Sharar* means "sparks that jump out from fire." The meaning of *qaṣr* is well-known (palace, castle, mansion). *Jimālah* is the plural of *jamal*, which means "male camel." The meaning should be clear.

هذا يَوْمُ لا يَنْطِقُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾ وَ لا يُؤْذَنُ لَهُمْ فَيَعْتَذِرُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(77:35-37) ***This is a day wherein they will not speak, nor will they be permitted to offer excuses. Woe to the deniers on that day!***

The demonstrative pronoun "this" refers to the Day of Judgment. What is meant by "permission" is the permission to speak or apologize. *Offer excuses* (77:36) is added to the clause, *will not speak* (77:35), in the same context of negation.

The meaning is: "This is a day when they—meaning the people who are resurrected—will not speak. Nor will they make excuses because they will not be permitted to speak or apologize." The negation of speaking in these verses does not contradict its affirmation in other verses, because that day will consist of various stages. In some stages people will be questioned and will have to answer. In other stages, their mouths will be sealed, and they will be unable to speak. We explained this under the verse: *The day it comes, no one shall speak except by His leave* (11:105). The reader should refer to that discussion.

هذا يَوْمُ الْفَصْلِ جَمَعْناكُمْ وَ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾ فَإِنْ كانَ لَكُمْ كَيْدٌ فَكِيدُونِ ﴿٣٩﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

(77:38-40) ***"This is the Day of Judgement*** **(al-faṣl)**. ***We have brought together you and the ancients. If you have any stratagems [left], try out your stratagems against Me!" Woe to the deniers on that day!***

It is called a day of *faṣl* (separation, distinction, differentiation) since God will separate and distinguish between the followers of truth and the followers of falsehood through His decisive judgment between them. The Qur'an says: *Indeed your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that about which they used to differ* (32:25); *Indeed your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that about which they used to differ* (10:93, 45:17).

… We have brought together you and the ancients: This is addressed to the disbelievers among the Prophet's nation, in the sense that they are a subsequent generation, in contrast to *the ancients*. The Qur'an says: *That is a day on which all humankind will be gathered* (11:103); *We shall muster them, and We will not leave out anyone of them* (18:47).

If you have any stratagems [left], try out your stratagems against Me:

That is, "If you can devise any plot against Me to counteract My punishment, then do so." This address is a humiliating challenge that indicates their total loss of all power and ability on that day, as it will become manifest that all power belongs to the Almighty God alone. The Qur'an says: *the wrongdoers will see, when they sight the punishment, that power, altogether, belongs to Allah, and that Allah is severe in punishment. When those who were followed will disown the followers, and they will sight the punishment while all their means of recourse will be cut off* (2:165-166).

This verse—*If you have any stratagems [left], try out your stratagems against Me* (77:39)—is more comprehensive than the verse: *O company of jinn and humans! If you can pass through the confines of the heavens and the earth, then do pass through. But you will not pass through except by an authority [from Allah]* (55:33), because the latter is specifically about the ability to escape, while the current verse of discussion is unqualified.

… try out your stratagems against Me: While the last verse [77:38] was in the first person plural, this verse switches to the first person singular. The point behind this transition is that the command in the verse is a humiliating challenge. Such command should issue from the Source which holds all might and power, which is God alone. If the verse had said, "Try out your stratagems against *Us*," then it would not reflect God's singular omnipotence.

إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي ظِلالٍ وَ عُيُونٍ ﴿٤١﴾ وَ فَواكِهَ مِمَّا يَشْتَهُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾ كُلُوا وَ اشْرَبُوا هَنِيئاً
بِما كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾ إِنَّا كَذلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾

(77:41-45) ***Indeed the Godwary will be amid shades and springs, and fruits* (fawākih)*, such as they desire. [They will be told:] "Eat and drink to your heart's content, [as a reward] for what you used to do." Thus indeed do We reward the good-doers. Woe to the deniers on that day!***

The first verse refers to the shades of paradise where they will rest, and its fountains from which they will drink. *Fawākih* is the plural of *fākihah* (fruit).

Eat and drink to your heart's content, [**as a reward**] ***for what you used to do:*** The imperative mood in this verse implies permission and freedom [not obligation]. Apparently "eating and drinking" are used metaphorically for any kind of enjoyment of heavenly pleasures, not strictly food and drink. Such usage is quite common, as "eating" (*akl*) is used for any

kind of usage and consumption.

Thus indeed do We reward the good-doers: This verse affirms their happy ending.

كُلُوا وَ تَمَتَّعُوا قَلِيلاً إِنَّكُمْ مُجْرِمُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

(77:46-47) ***"Eat and enjoy a little! You are indeed guilty." Woe to the deniers on that day!***

The address here is much like saying: "Do whatever you wish; it will not help you in any way." Such an expression is meant to disappoint the audience from achieving the goal that they wish to reach through their course of conduct. Two other similar verses are: *Execute whatever you may execute. You can only decide about the life of this world* (20:72); *Act as you wish; indeed He sees best what you do* (41:40).

Eat and enjoy a little…: The adverb "a little" (*qalīlan*) implies an omission here. The implied meaning is "enjoy a little *enjoyment*" or "enjoy for a little *while*." It means that their eating and enjoyment will be ineffective in warding off God's punishment. Hence, they may proceed to indulge and have their desire [in this life], but that will be of no benefit to them [in their eternal life]. The verse specifically mentions eating and enjoyment in accordance to their mindset. To those who denied the hereafter, happiness only consists of worldly happiness, and that amounts to the ability to indulge in more eating and consumption, much like irrational animals. The Qur'an says: *As for the faithless, they enjoy and eat just like the cattle eat, and the fire will be their [final] abode* (47:12).

… You are indeed guilty: This sentence justifies the previous imperative statement. That is: "Your little eating and transitory enjoyment will be of no avail to you *because* you are guilty of denying the Day of Judgment. Indeed the punishment of such deniers is hell."

وَ إِذا قِيلَ لَهُمُ ارْكَعُوا لا يَرْكَعُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾ وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

(77:48-49) ***And when they are told, "Bow down," they do not bow down! Woe to the deniers on that day!***

Here are some suggested views concerning what is meant by "bowing" (*rukūʿ*) in this verse:

(1) It means the prayer.

Comment: This usage is based on bowing being a part and element of the prayer.

(2) It means humility, devotion and subservience before God, which is reflected in responding to His call, accepting His message, following His religion, and worshiping Him.

(3) It means prostration, which they will be ordered to perform on the Day of Resurrection, as reflected in the verse: *and they are summoned to prostrate themselves, they will not be able [to do it]* (68:42).

Comment: The last two interpretations are not apparent.

This verse builds on the preceding verses, which threatened the deniers of the Day of Judgment, and described the consequences of their denial. It says that they do not worship God when they are ordered to do so, just as they do not believe in the Last Day. After all, it is meaningless to worship God for someone who denies reward and retribution. The verse is also a prelude to the next verse: *So what discourse will they believe after this?* (77:50). Another possible connection, attributed to al-Zamakhsharī, is that the verse adds to *the deniers* (77:47). The effective meaning would be: "Woe on that day to those who deny and those who do not bow down when they are told to do so."

***And when they are told…*:** There is a shift of address here from the second person to the third person. This is because they are left on their own to do whatever they wish, as they were told: *Eat and enjoy* (77:46).

فَبِأَيِّ حَدِيثٍ بَعْدَهُ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

(77:50) ***So what discourse will they believe after this?***

The Qur'an is a divine sign and miracle, which has clarified for them, through the most expressive discourse, that God is the only deity Who is worthy of worship, and that they will face the Day of Judgment. Now, if they do not believe in this discourse, in what other discourse would they believe?

The verse implies that there is no hope in their acceptance and belief in God, His Messenger, and the Last Day. The verse also clarifies that it is justified to leave them on their own and stop calling them to faith—by telling them: *Eat and enjoy* (77:46)—because they are not a people who would believe, and there is no benefit in calling them to faith. The only benefit in that is to complete God's argument against them, and leave them without any excuse.

Examining Narrations

(1) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *Have We not created you from a base* (mahīn) *fluid* (77:20): It [*mahīn*] means foul-smelling. *Then lodged it in a secure abode* (77:21): In the womb. *Until a known term* (77:21): Until the end of one's life.

(2) There is narration from Imam al-Kāẓim which compares the verse, *Did We not destroy the ancients?* (77:16) with those who refrained from obeying the messengers with respect to their successors. The Imam also interprets *Then made the latter ones follow them* (77:17) as those who wronged Muḥammad's household.[1]

Author's comment: This should be viewed as extending the verse to other contexts (called *jary*), not an interpretation for the apparent and primary meaning of the verse (called *tafsīr*). Not to mention that the narration suffers from internal inconsistency.

(3) When Imam ʿAlī returned from the Battle of Ṣiffīn, as he came across the graves [outside Kūfah] he said, "These are the *kifāt* of the dead," meaning their dwellings. Then as he came across the houses in Kūfah he said, "These are the *kifāt* of the living." Then he recited the verse: *Have We not made the earth a receptacle* (kifātan)*, both for the living and the dead* (77:25-26).[2]

(4) Concerning *rawāsī shāmikhāt* (77:27) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It means towering moutains.

(5) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *Get off toward the triple-forked shadow* (77:30): It will have three branches of fire. *Indeed it throws up sparks [huge] like palaces* (77:32): The sparkles of hell will be as huge as palaces and mountains.

(6) Concerning *Indeed the Godwary will be amid shades and springs* (77:41) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: They will be in shades that are brighter than sunlight.

(7) It is said that the verse, *And when they are told, "Bow down," they do not bow down!* (77:48) was revealed with reference to the Thaqīf. When the Messenger of God ordered them to pray, they

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1 *Al-Kāfī*.

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*. It is also narrated that Imam al-Ṣādiq said the same thing as he looked at the graves, reported in *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ḥammād.

said, "We do not bow down, because that is an insult to us."
"There is no good," the Prophet replied, "in a religion that is devoid of bowing and prostration."[1]

Author's comment: It is not clear how this story relates to the verse, because it must have occurred after the Prophet's migration to Medina.[2]

(8) Concerning the same verse [77:48] *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: When they are told, "Subscribe to the Imam," they do not subscribe to him.

Author's comment: This would be extending the verse to other contexts (*jary*), not the verse's interpretation (*tafsīr*).

The end. All praise be to Almighty God.

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

2 The chapter was revealed in Mecca *before* the migration, but the tribe Thaqīf lived in Ṭāʾif, which converted to Islam after the conquest of Mecca in the eighth year *after* the migration. However, the story could relate to the Prophet's short visit to Ṭāʾif before his migration to Medina, assuming that bowing and/or prostration was already prescribed. (Trans.)